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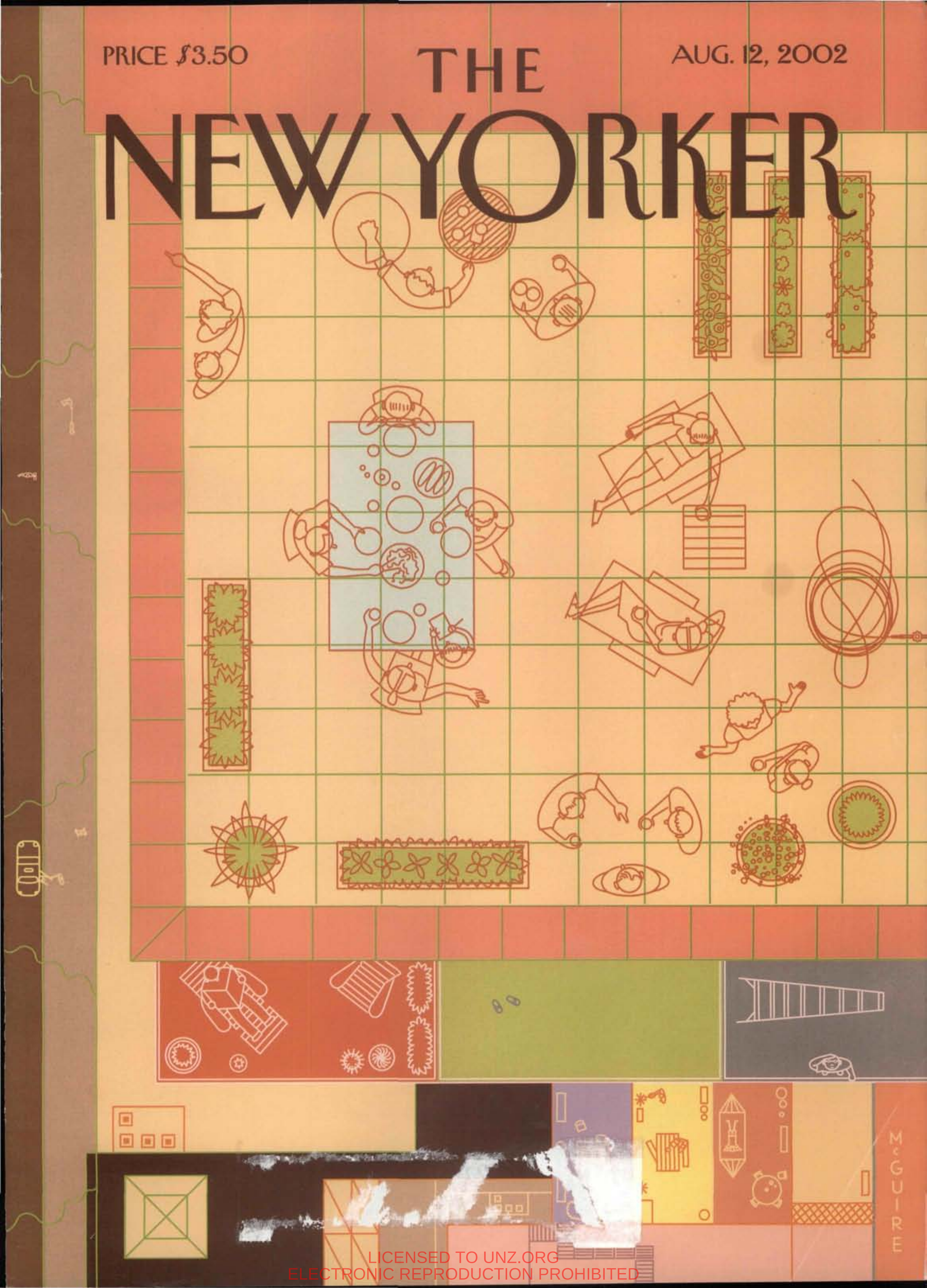
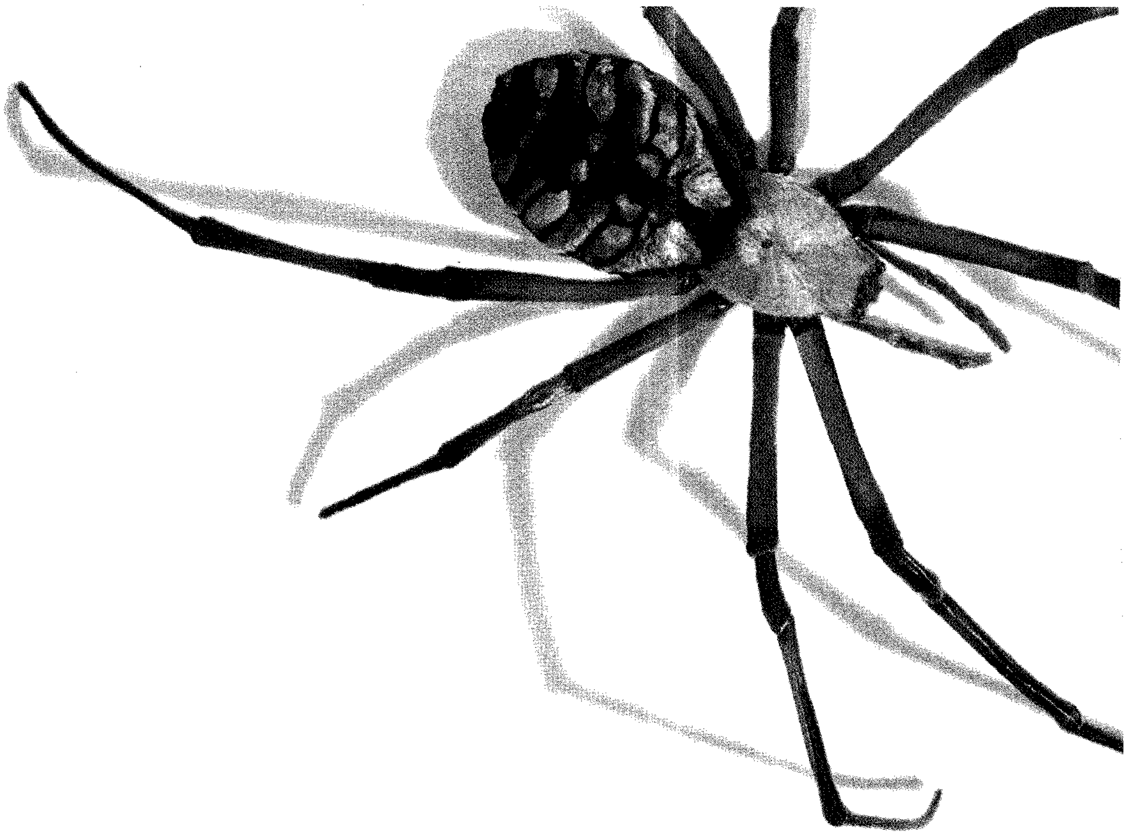
THE NEW YORKER

AUG. 12, 2002





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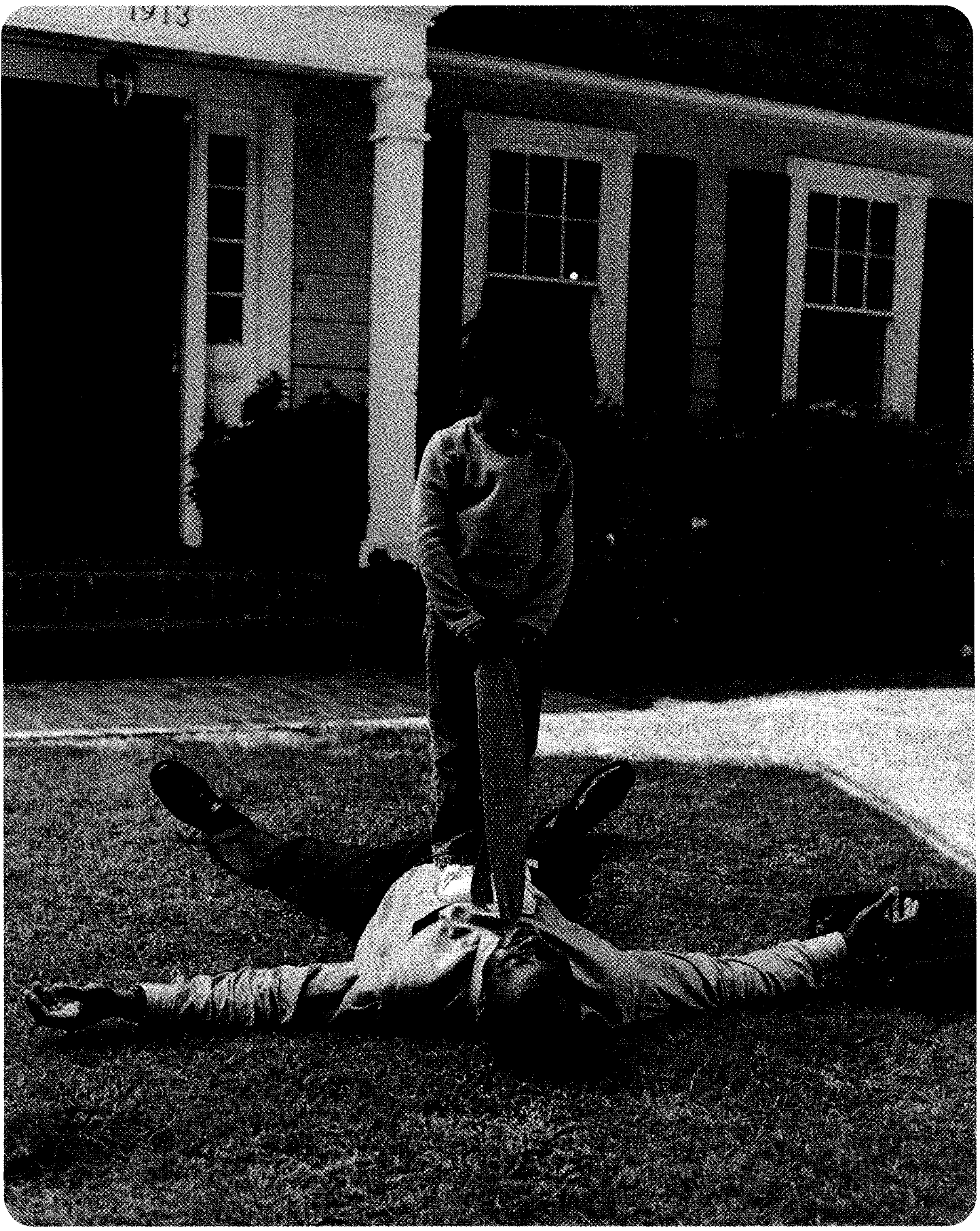

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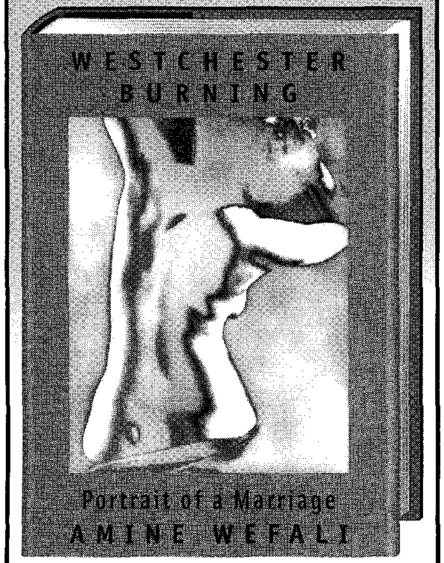

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AUGUST 12, 2002

8 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN
23 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
Of bombs and Iraq; Wall Street rumor mill.

Peter J. Boyer 30 THE POLITICAL SCENE
The New Texan
Why a Senate race has Bush worried.

Michael Azerrad 37 ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS
Urban Legends
They Might Be Giants' obscure rock success.

Isabel Hilton 42 LETTER FROM PAKISTAN
The General in His Labyrinth
Inside Musharraf's puzzle palace.

Kevin Conley 46 ON PHOTOGRAPHY
Erotic images from Nobuyoshi Araki.

Mark Singer 56 U.S. JOURNAL
The Gang's All Here
How bikers took over a California town.

Dave Eggers 62 FICTION
"Where Were We"

THE CRITICS
BOOKS
Malcolm Gladwell 76 *How a Chicago heat wave turned fatal.*
81 Briefly Noted
Anthony Lane 82 THE CURRENT CINEMA
"Signs."

POEMS
Jean Valentine 32 "My Old Body"
Medbh McGuckian 48 "Filming the Famine"

COVER *"Bird's Eye View BBQ," by Richard McGuire* THE BACK PAGE *"The Collapse of the Russian Tea Room," by Bruce McCall* DRAWINGS *Leo Cullum, William Hamilton, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Lee Lorenz, Frank Cotham, Sam Gross, Roz Chast, Charles Barsotti, Robert Mankoff, P. C. Vey, Robert Weber, Eric Lewis, George Booth, John O'Brien, Tom Cheney, Matthew Diffee, Arnie Levin*

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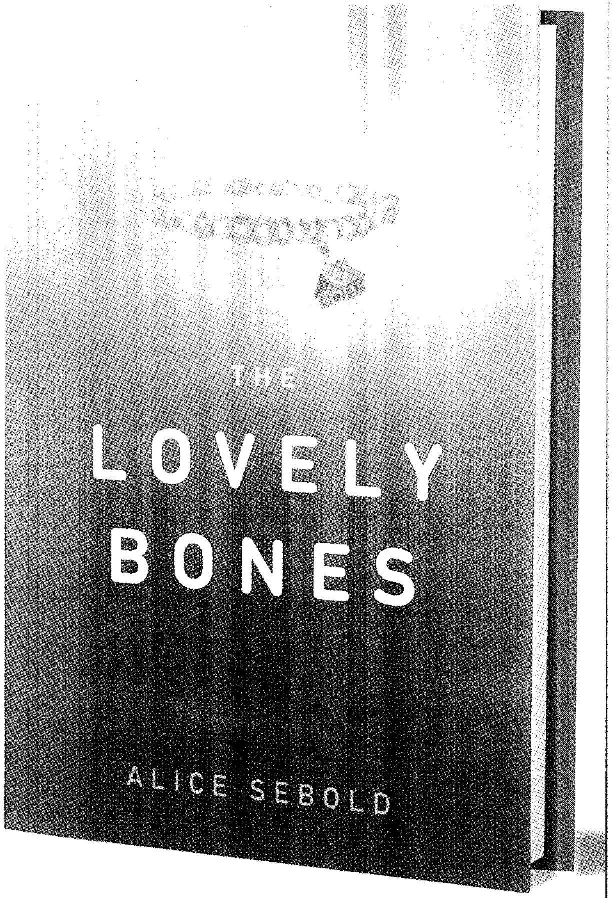

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Dave Eggers (Fiction, p. 62), the editor of *McSweeney's* and the author of "A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius," has a new novel coming out next month.

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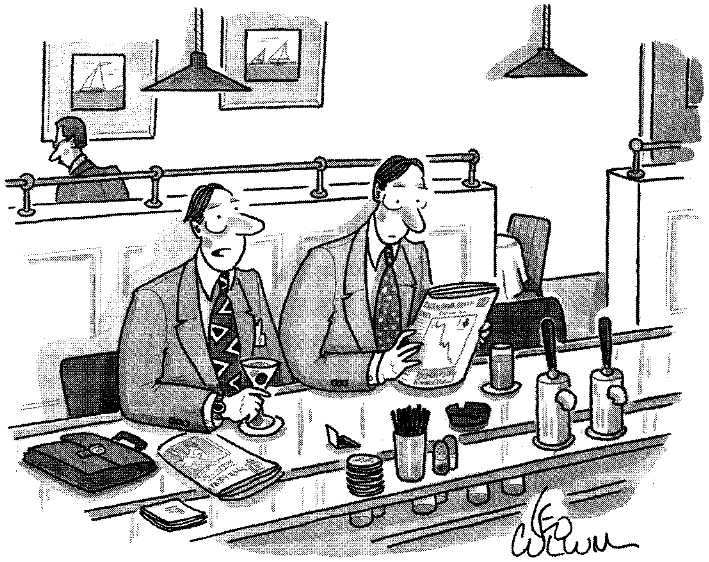
Joe Klein (The Talk of the Town, p. 24) is the author of "The Natural: The Misunderstood Presidency of Bill Clinton." ♦



"My broker jumped out a window, but that's small consolation."

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THE MAIL

TALENT, ETHICS, AND ENRON

Malcolm Gladwell, in his critical look at our book, "The War for Talent," suggests that we led companies astray by advising them to become "obsessed" with the pursuit of talent ("The Talent Myth," July 22nd). In doing so, he misses many aspects of our work. He writes that we "spend very little time discussing" how to identify talent. However, we make it clear that talent is not simply "smarts" or prestigious degrees but the full set of capabilities that a person brings to a job. We write that it is "some combination of a sharp strategic mind, leadership ability, emotional maturity, communications skills, the ability to attract and inspire other talented people, entrepreneurial instincts, functional skills, and the ability to deliver results." While companies should develop all their employees, people do perform differently. We recommend basing promotions and rewards on performance—with teamwork being part of the criteria. Obviously, a strong pool of talent isn't the only factor that makes an organization great. But our research shows that attracting and developing talented managers does lead to better corporate performance.

Ed Michaels
Atlanta, Ga.
Helen Handfield-Jones
Toronto, Ontario
Beth Axelrod
Stamford, Conn.

Gladwell correctly calls into question the narrow idea of talent which has guided companies like Enron and McKinsey. As he suggests, institutions need to consider more practical and people-oriented forms of knowledge. But the problem is not a certain view of intellect; it is a complete disregard of ethics, morality, and character. Not at the rhetorical level, to be sure: the McKinsey-trained Enron executive Jeffrey Skilling spoke of doing "God's work"; his partner Kenneth Lay declared, "One of the most satisfying things in life is to create a highly moral and ethical environment." Instead, they and others created atmospheres in which employees did not think about what was improper, and what the world would be like if everyone behaved as they did.

Howard Gardner
Professor of Cognition and Education
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Cambridge, Mass.

STAYING WITH THE CHURCH

Joan Acocella's touching conclusion to her review of Garry Wills's "Why I Am a Catholic"—"it is a great satisfaction to have the Church's history analyzed by a mind so critical but still so in love"—uncovers the reason that the Church cannot rely on its ancient authority to survive (Books, July 22nd). The Church's magisterium—its insistence that, by divine authority, its teachings are to be obeyed regardless of one's own sense—long ago lost its power, especially after Pope John XXIII made it legitimate for the laity to trust their conscience. The vague sense of duty that remains is based not on awe but on sentiment. One can admire Wills's steadfastness, but not his need to remain in such a relationship.

Blayney Colmore
Jacksonville, Vt.

Acocella writes that Wills, in looking for a way back to basic Catholic teachings, found a hero in St. Augustine. But Augustine hardly stands apart from the troubling aspects of Church history. He laid the groundwork for the Inquisition with the principle of *coge intrare* ("force them to come in"), whereby he came to approve of the physical coercion of those who disagreed with Rome. Augustine also would have argued that *Humanae Vitae*, the birth-control encyclical, did not go far enough, since it said that married couples may enjoy sex, which he did not allow.

Bill Mazzella
Yonkers, N.Y.

•

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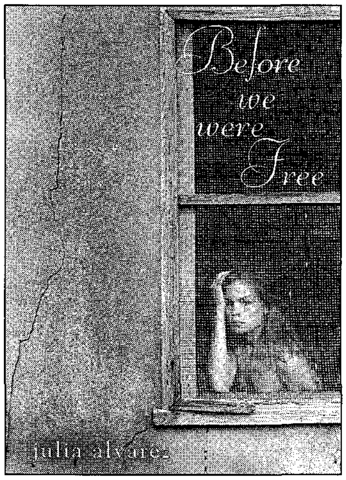
Anita de la Torre
Never Questioned
Her Freedom...



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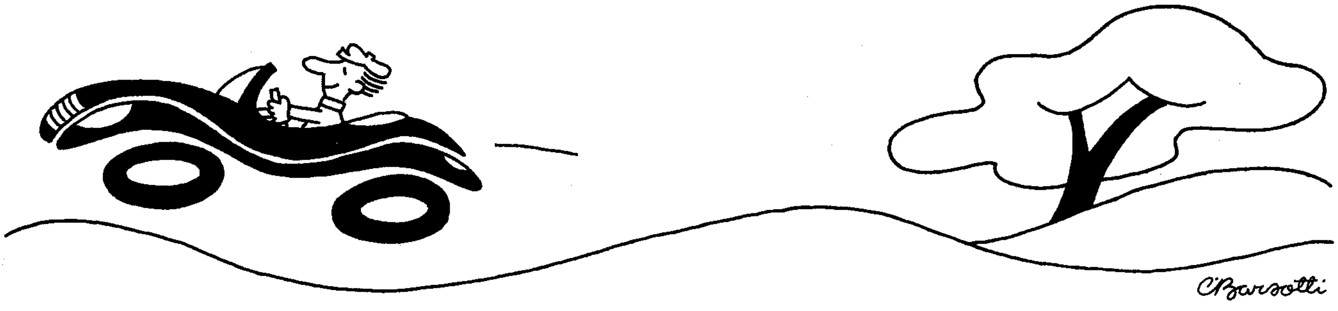

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE BOYS FROM SYRACUSE
Rodgers and Hart's 1938 musical, with a new book by Nicky Silver, in a Roundabout Theatre Company staging. Scott Ellis is the director. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

FRANKIE AND JOHNNY IN THE CLAIR DE LUNE
Edie Falco and Stanley Tucci star in Terrence McNally's 1987 play, under the direction of Joe Mantello. Two previews on Aug. 7. Opens Aug. 8 at 6:45. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

HAIRSPRAY
A new musical, based on the 1988 John Waters film, with a book by Mark O'Donnell and Thomas Meehan and songs by Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman. Jack O'Brien is the director. In previews. (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL
Experimental, multidisciplinary, and multimedia performances by troupes from eleven countries and twelve states, staged at numerous venues throughout lower Manhattan. Aug. 9-25. (A complete list of shows is available at www.fringenyc.org. For information and tickets, call 420-8877.)

OPENED RECENTLY

ALL OVER
Rosemary Harris and Michael Learned lead a well-cast ensemble in the Roundabout Theatre Company's revival of Edward Albee's 1971 play about living with mortality. They portray the bitter wife and loving mistress, respectively, of a dying man of great wealth and social standing, who have come together at his deathbed—along with his dejected son and angry daughter (Patrick Garner and Pamela Nyberg), an old family friend (John Carter), and a very canny old doctor-and-nurse duo (Bill Moor and Myra Carter). Thanks to the fine performances, all the sting, humor, and sadness of Albee's view comes through: we're all inherently selfish, so loving the dying is often easier than loving the living. Emily Mann is the director. (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 307-4100.)

AS YOU LIKE IT
Shakespeare's comedy, transported to a contemporary inner-city environment by the Worth Street Theatre company. Jeff Cohen is the director. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 206-1515.)

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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CAPITOL STEPS: WHEN BUSH COMES TO SHOVE
The Washington, D.C., comedy troupe returns to New York with their latest satirical revue. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS
In the Aquila Theatre Company's excellent production of Shakespeare's intricately foolish story, the laughs are many and the delights deep. The producer-director team of Peter Meineck and Robert Richmond start with a reverence for the playwright, then employ just about any theatrical technique that will illuminate his words—among them song, dance, song and dance, dumb show, vaudeville, and burlesque. The seven cast members, led here by Mark Saturno and Louis Butelli as the two sets of twins, mix remarkable range with insane energy. Anthony Cochrane's music wittily underscores some scenes, and it fairly drives others. The setting, the Turkish port city of Ephesus, affords the opportunity for a bright and exotic production design. The costume designer, Sarah Hill, uses the inevitable fezzes and caftans, but in the world of Aquila Edwardian jackets and forties sundresses work perfectly well, too. (CSC, 136 E. 13th St. 239-6200.)

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS
The Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival's version. (Boscobel Restoration, Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

ENDPAPERS
The first full-length play by Thomas McCormack, the retired C.E.O. of an independently owned publishing house (St. Martin's), about choosing a successor as C.E.O. of an independently owned publishing house. The play is highly literate (imagine: grammar jokes!) and full of zingy one-liners. The characters are not just types but unavoidable types: the crusty chief, the heir apparent, the office lesbian, the well-dressed hatchet, the ambitious blond assistant who is bound for glory. All are well played by an ensemble cast, under the direction of Pamela Berlin. The set, by Neil Patel, is perfect: you may feel as if you'd never left the office. (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

THE GOAT; OR, WHO IS SYLVIA?
Edward Albee's ninety-minute anecdote about a happily married, successful architect who falls in love with a goat called Sylvia. It takes all of Albee's expertise to tease this joke into an evening; but it allows Mercedes Ruehl some hilarious moments of high dudgeon as she trashes the house and her husband (Bill Pullman) for "cruising livestock." David Esbjornson is the director. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE GRADUATE
This pointless production, starring Kathleen Turner as Mrs. Robinson, is endless and full of dead air. There are exactly two pleasures here: Victor Slezak, as Mr. Robinson, and Murphy Guyer, as Benjamin's father; they depict beautifully the anger and anxiety that underlie their postwar poolside bonhomie. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/15/02.) (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE GUYS
A dialogue between a fire captain who lost eight of his men on September 11th and an editor who helps him prepare their eulogies, written by Anne Nelson, a journalist, and directed by Jim Simpson, the Flea Theatre's artistic director. It's an artful and moving re-creation of the relationships New Yorkers formed as a result of that day—of the way that people "jumped tracks" and suddenly saw into each other's lives—and an admirable tribute to the men who died. (The Flea, 41 White St. 206-1515.)

HARLEM SONG
George C. Wolfe's latest is a musical history of Harlem show business from the nineteen-twenties to the present. (Apollo Theatre, 253 W. 125th St. 307-7171.)

ICE FACTORY FESTIVAL
The sixth offering in SoHo Think Tank's annual summer celebration of new works is "Catcall," a documentary-style comedy by Rebecca Ramirez. Aug. 7-10 at 7. The festival continues through Aug. 17. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 966-4844.)

I'M NOT RAPPAPORT
Judd Hirsch and Ben Vereen star in a revival of Herb Gardner's 1985 comedy. Daniel Sullivan is the director. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

INTO THE WOODS
Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's 1987 fairy-tale-derived musical isn't so much a rethinking of fairy tales as it is a parable about growing up and finding your place in the community, and about learning to live with uncertainty and ambivalence. The archetypal material is treated with suitable directness and simplicity, and yet the show lacks none of the intelligence or emotional honesty we expect from Sondheim. Mr. Lapine is the director. (5/13/02) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

METAMORPHOSES
Ovid's tales, loosely adapted and directed by Mary Zimmerman, who had the ingenious idea of staging the caprice of the gods in a swimming pool. The production is fun and full of wonder, but it illustrates rather than dramatizes psychic struggle. The show's gimmick, the pool, turns out to be its meta-

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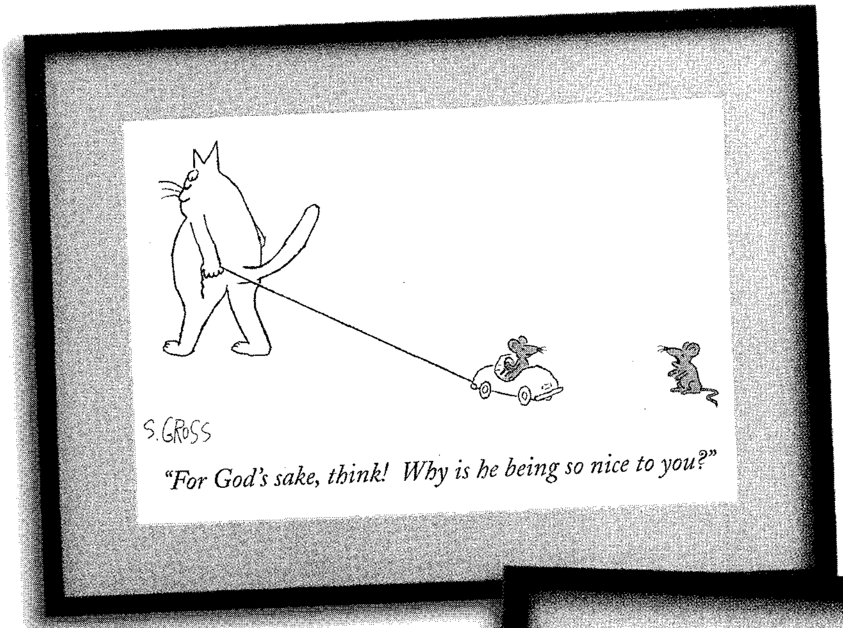
S.GROSS
"For God's sake, think! Why is he being so nice to you?"

Sam Gross 1998 (ACTUAL SIZE 11" x 14")

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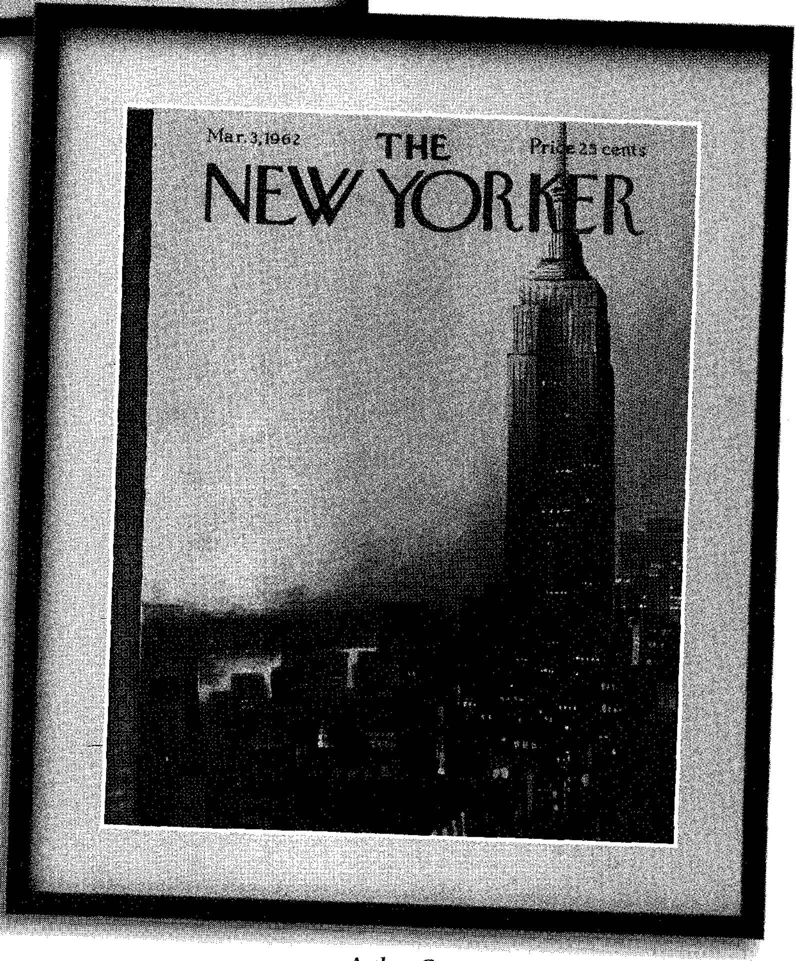

Arthur Getz 1962 (ACTUAL SIZE 23" x 29")

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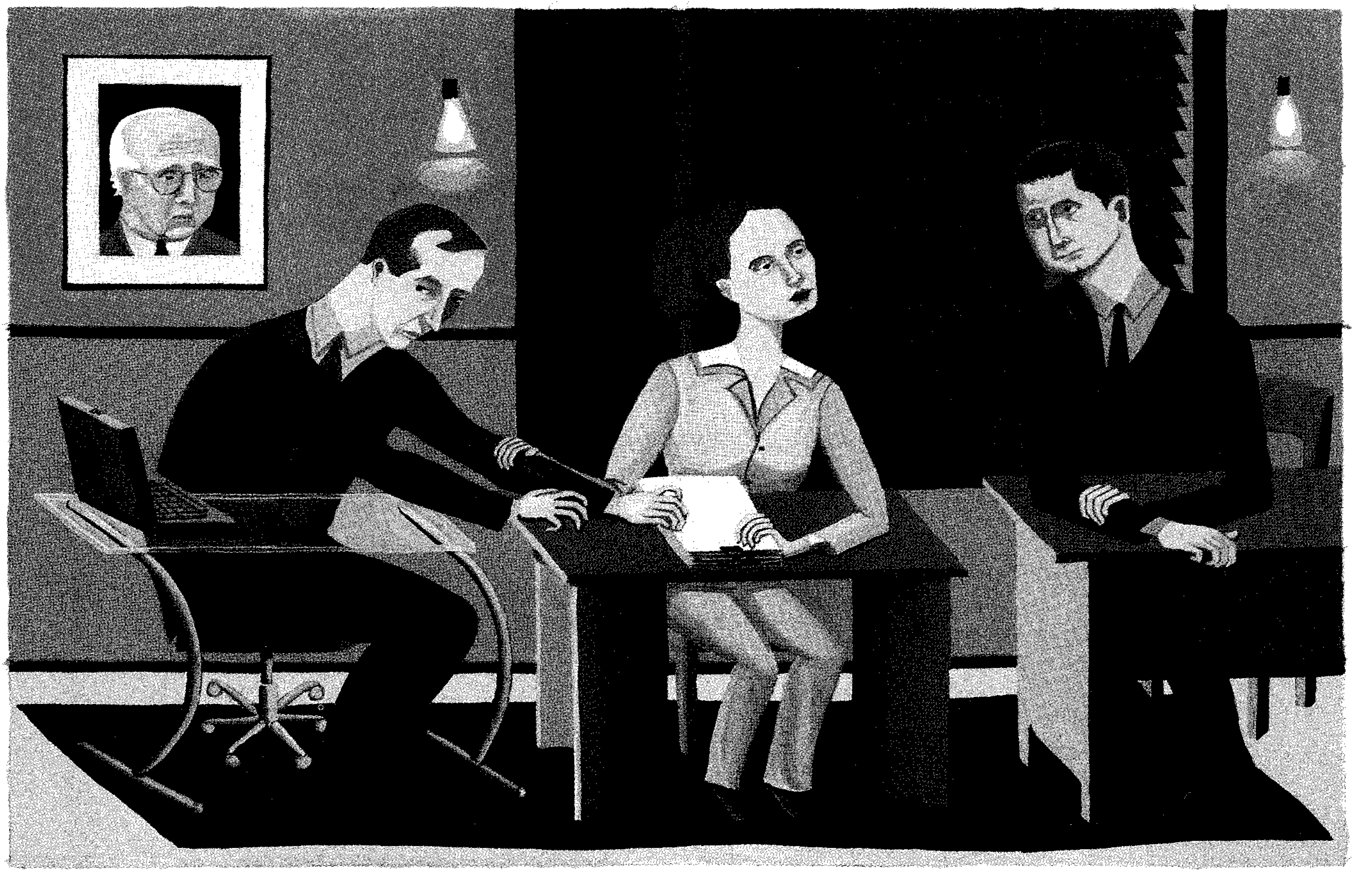
phor—refreshing and shallow. (3/18/02) (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING
The Gorilla Rep's free outdoor production of Shakespeare's comedy. (Fort Tryon Park at 190th St. For more information, call 330-8086.)

OKLAHOMA!
There are stupendous pleasures in the Royal National Theatre's version of Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1943 American classic. Many of them are due to the high-spirited, humorous choreography of Susan Stroman, and to Anthony Ward's picturesque set. But technique, which can make a show work, is not enough to make it wonderful. (4/1/02) (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

ONLY THE END OF THE WORLD
A semiautobiographical drama by the late French playwright Jean Luc Lagarce, staged by Company Charnière. (Theatre 3, at 311 W. 43rd St. 252-4437.)



Tim Hopper, Maria Thayer, and Bruce McCarty, in "Endpapers," by Thomas McCormack, at Variety Arts.

KATHY OSBORN

THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD
J. M. Synge's classic 1907 comedy about a young man lionized by a remote Irish village after he shows up in their midst with a story of having killed his abusive father—and the fallout when the father shows up only slightly bloodied. The show explores issues of reputation, love, lust, and the thrill of scandal in a surprisingly modern way, and in remarkably beautiful language. The Irish Rep cast is strong, especially Aedin Moloney, as a lonely widow. Kirk Bookman's warm lighting makes the most of David Raphael's detailed stone-cottage set. Directed by Charlotte Moore with a sure hand. (132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER
Mark Twain's novel has been adapted for the stage and musicalized by Neil Berg (score and lyrics) and Bernie Garza and Ray Roderick (book). (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

PRIVATE LIVES
In Noël Coward's comedy of bad manners, two wonderful actors, Alan Rickman and Lindsay Duncan, play the embattled exes Elyot and Amanda—dandies of detachment who jilt their new spouses and run away together to a Parisian love nest. Howard Davies's radical notion is to play Elyot and Amanda's physical passion for real. This allows him to capitalize on the wonderful chemistry between Rickman and Duncan, but it also throws the comedy weirdly off kilter. (5/6/02) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

RICKY JAY: ON THE STEM
The master magician's tribute to the flimflammery and weird entertainments that have cropped up over the years along the length of Broadway, "the stem that winds the watch" of New York City. Prepare to be happily hornswoggled. Directed by David Mamet. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE
Just like the 1967 movie it's based on, this musical is supposed to be all madcap Jazz Age fizziness, but the harder the cast sings and dances, the flatter the enterprise falls. The colors seem garish rather than gay, the manic energy feels forced at gunpoint, and the only thing you recall about Sutton Foster's Millie after you leave the theatre is her huge white teeth and bouncy black bob. Call it thoroughly boring, shrilly. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.)

TOPDOG/UNDERDOG
The Public Theatre's production of Suzan-Lori Parks's play stars Jeffrey Wright and Mos Def. George C. Wolfe is the director. (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. Closes Aug. 11.)

TWELFTH NIGHT
Unless you're a stodgy Shakespeare scholar (or just a bit of a pill), you're bound to enjoy the Public's outdoor staging of the Bard's romantic comedy. Maybe Julia Stiles isn't all that comfortable in her role as Viola (she's only twenty-one years old, so cut her some slack), and it's true that Jimmy Smits could be more subtle as the lovesick Orsino, but they both look fabulous, and the obvious fun that they and the rest of the cast are having is truly infectious—the crowd eats it up, which is just how Will would have wanted it. Oliver Platt and Michael Stuhlbarg, as the feckless Sir Toby Belch and his companion Sir Andrew Aguecheek, are hilarious together (Stuhlbarg is especially funny when he begins preparing for a duel). Zach Braff, as Viola's twin brother, also stands out in a terrific cast that includes Kristen Johnston, Christopher Lloyd, and Kathryn Meisle. And that Shakespeare was a pretty good writer. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 539-8750. Closes Aug. 11.)

21 DOG YEARS: DOING TIME@AMAZON.COM
Michael Daisey spent three years at Amazon during its headiest, do-no-wrong period. And now he's telling all. He's a charismatic performer, and up until the end, when he becomes a bit self-righteous, his show has the insightful hostility of the best comedy. The audience doesn't learn anything new about the dot-com bubble and its discontents, but it's fun to get the view from the inside. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.)

VALPARAISO
Don DeLillo's play, staged by the Rude Mechanicals Theatre Company. (Blue Heron Arts Center, 123 E. 24th St. 206-1515. Closes Aug. 18.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (ABRIDGED)
Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.

CONTACT
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.

42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

THE FULL MONTY
Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.

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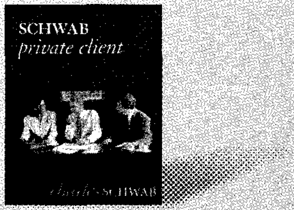

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THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

LOVE, JANIS
Village Theatre, 158 Bleecker St. 307-4100.

MAMMA MIA!
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 563-5544.

NOISES OFF
Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.

PERFECT CRIME
Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.

THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

PROOF
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.

TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

UNDERNEATH THE LINTEL
Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.

URINETOWN
Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS
The annual free alfresco concert series. Aug. 7 at 6: Diablo Dance Theatre of Taiwan R.O.C. (Robertson Plaza.) ♦ Aug. 8 at 5:30: A-Quo Danza Contemporánea of Mexico, with Stephen Petronio and Carlo Nicolau. (Robertson Plaza.) ♦ Aug. 8 at 6:30: Alice Farley Dance Theatre. (North Plaza.) ♦ Aug. 8 at 8: José Limón Dance Company. (Damrosch Park Bandshell.) ♦ Aug. 9 at 10:30 A.M. and 6: The Jiving Lindy Hoppers of London. (Robertson Plaza.) (For more information, call 875-5108. Through Aug. 25.)

ELIOT FELD'S BALLET TECH
The company returns to the theatre it helped found for its annual summer preview. Aug. 5, Aug. 8, and Aug. 10 at 8: "Simon Sez," "Pacific Dances," and "Pianola: Raven." ♦ Aug. 6 and Aug. 9 at 8: "Pianola: Indigo," "Endsong," and "Behold the Man." ♦ Aug. 7 at 8: "Pianola: Indigo," "Yo Shakespeare," "Mending," and "Pacific Dances." (The Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800.)

CABIN FEVER
The L.A.-based choreographer Raiford Rogers and the composer Sandra Tsing-Loh collaborate on a work that turns a dilemma (how to grow older in a land obsessed with youth) into a full-length dance. (The Duke, 229 42nd St. 239-6200. Aug. 8-10 at 8 and Aug. 11 at 2.)

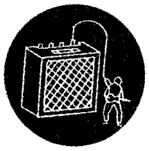
"BALLS"
The Eva Dean Dance company presents a series of concerts that rely on spheroids of many descriptions. Aug. 7 at 6: "Balls, Balls, Balls." (Union Square Park, Broadway at 14th St.) ♦ Aug. 11 at noon: "Bounce." (Mazer Theatre, 197 East Broadway. For more information, call 718-857-8368. Through Sept. 1.)

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL
The festival continues through Aug. 25 with more than a hundred and ninety-five works at twenty-one venues. ♦ Aug. 10 at 8:45, Aug. 11 at 7, and August 12 at 4:45: "Appearances." When the choreographer Dagmar Spain, who was born in Czechoslovakia and grew up in West Germany, moved to New York twelve years ago, her first impression, she says, "was how much the city challenged you *not* to become one of the masses. It was aggressively individualistic, even on the street." After September 11th, the city struck her again as a willful creature. But this time, she noticed "how much it challenges you to coexist." In this buoyant ensemble piece, where jangly and loose pedestrian gestures are translated into bright, bold Constructivist moves, Spain captures both the jarring collisions and the miraculous coherence of New York streets. Jim Papoulis's exuberant score contributes to the fun. (45 Bleecker Theatre, 45 Bleecker St., at Lafayette St. 420-8877. Through Aug. 17.) ♦ Aug. 10 at 7 and Aug. 11 at noon: "Billy Nijinsky." This intimate, quick-shifting dance-theatre piece, by the former Tharp dancer Richard Colton and the current Blue Man Randall Jaynes, was inspired by the curious fact that the longer Nijinsky has been dead, the more spectacular his dancing becomes: "Billy Nijinsky" is less about the dancer turned madman himself than about the myth of mad genius that continues to grow around him. Billy, a regular Joe with an unsteady mind, lives by the common belief that wretched mental confusion can produce godlike acts of brilliance, or at least something other than constant defeat. "The idea of Nijinsky," Colton says, "keeps Billy afloat." (Harry de Jur Playhouse, 466 Grand St. 420-8877. Through Aug. 22.) (For more information and a complete listing of Fringe Festival events, visit www.fringenyc.org.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL
Aug. 7-9 at 8, Aug. 10 at 2 and 8, and Aug. 11 at 2: Mark Morris Dance Group. ♦ Aug. 8-9 at 8:15, Aug. 10 at 2:15 and 8:15, and Aug. 11 at 5: Martha@the Pillow. (Becket, Mass. For information about tickets, call 413-243-0745.)

POP NOTES



GOOD ALBUMS WITH GREAT SONGS
It's insulting to call Sleater-Kinney the best female rock band in the world when they're one of the best rock bands, period. Still, the Portland, Oregon-based power trio is unmistakably a girl group, thanks to Corin Tucker's piercing, ululating vocals (think Belinda Carlisle with a license to kill) and a preoccupation with gender injustice, both personal and political. The group's albums, always mighty, can be monochromatic, but the new release, **"One Beat"** (Kill Rock Stars), adds novel touches: horns, in "Step Aside," and synthesizer bleeps and even male vocals, in "Prisstina." Sleater-Kinney is good enough to take risks, but they are sometimes too risky for their own good; the strongest track is the album closer, "Sympathy," a preposterously muscular four-minute masterpiece that would, for most bands, be a career. Beginning as a sketch of a romantic opportunist ("I know I come to you only when in need / I'm not the best believer / Not the most deserving"), the song moves through self-pity, defiance, and fragility, thanks mainly to Tucker's performance: strangling some words while breathing life into others, she finds the seam between alternative rock and gospel.

Rhett Miller is best known for fronting the Old 97s, a band that moved from hard, hooky country music to hard, hooky pop music. His forthcoming solo album, **"The Instigator"** (Elektra), moves even further into popcraft; a bright-eyed record about men, women, and what passes between them, it kicks off with the rollicking "Our Love," which offers capsule biographies of famous doomed couples (Richard Wagner and Mathilde Wesendonk, Franz Kafka and Milena Jesenská Pollak). But "Our Love" is only a warmup for "This Is What I Do," an irresistibly self-referential portrait of the power-pop artist ("I'm going to sing this song forever / about a girl that I once knew / and how she is always leaving. / This is what I do"). Elsewhere on the record, Miller displays both cleverness and sentimentality; "This Is What I Do" fuses the two perfectly, and the harmonies are as summery as they should be.

—*Ben Greenman*

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
The Boss returns to his home state to kick off a whirlwind cross-country tour in support of "The Rising," his first studio recording with the E Street Band in nearly two decades. (Continental Airlines Arena, the Meadowlands. 212-307-7171. Aug. 7 at 8. ♦ Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Aug. 12 at 8.)

ERNEST RANGLIN
A linchpin of Jamaican music since the early days of ska, this venerated guitarist is also comfortable blending jazz and African idioms into his own rhythmically charged music. (MetroTech Commons, Flatbush Ave. at Myrtle Ave., Brooklyn. For more information, call 718-636-4100. Aug. 8 at noon.)

LATIN ALTERNATIVE MUSIC CONFERENCE
A host of established acts and promising up-and-comers from three continents convene to redefine the ecumenical genre known as Latin alternative. The weekend conference, now in its third year, serves as a music-industry summit, but, away from the networking hive and marketing panels, lay listeners reap the benefit of having so many far-flung bands in one place at one time. *La música alterlatina* pitches a big tent: rock, rap, funk, folk, metal, and electronica—all of which appear in pure and highly alloyed forms—cohabit with an ease that often eludes their Anglo counterparts. The fiesta begins Thursday night at Webster Hall, followed on Friday night by long sets at Celebrate Brooklyn! and Noche, and on Saturday at Central Park's SummerStage (see the listings below). For more information about the conference itself, which takes place at the Puck Building (Lafayette St. at Houston St.) and runs Aug. 8-10, visit www.latinalternative.com.

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!
Aug. 9 at 7: The Mexican singer-songwriter sensation **Ely Guerra** performs with an intensity that belies her petite frame and pink guitar. Her latest album, "Lotofire," couches her songwriting skills and acoustic-guitar work in mellow analog synthesizers and earthy bass. She shares the bill with energetic Mexican power-poppers **Jumbo** and multi-borough New Yorkers **Si*Sé**, who provide a summery blend of Latin-inflected trip-hop. (Prospect Park Bandshell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. 718-855-7882, ext. 45.)

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Aug. 10 at 3: Break out your yellow-and-green garments: the Brazilian supergroup **Skank**, no doubt still energized by recent World Cup events, bring their paeans to love and soccer to Central Park. They're not above Portuguese covers of Bob Dylan and the Police, but feel-good pop, ska, and reggae are the band's *feijão com arroz*. Skank shares the afternoon with **Enrique Bunbury**, the former front man of the longtime Spanish rock band Heroes del Silencio, and Argentine funk-rockers **Babasonicos.** Aug. 11 at 3: New York's own **Sonic Youth**, not quite so youthful but still indeed sonic after more than two decades as punky, avant-rock pioneers, bring in their arty, high-decibel, oddly tuned ruckus. With **Wadada Leo Smith** and his Golden Quartet. The avant-garde trumpeter and composer Smith has assembled as sterling a support unit as any new-jazz player could dream of: the pianist **Anthony Davis**, the bassist **Malachi Favors**, and the drummer **Jack DeJohnette.** (Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. 360-2777.)

OASIS
The United Kingdom's former flagship export returns despite failing to match the success of its Britpop masterpiece from 1995, "(What's the Story) Morning Glory?" The mouthy Gallagher brothers, the younger of whom vowed never to return to the States after September 11th, are sure to present their Beatle-esque fare with the requisite absence of humility. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Aug. 11 at 8. ♦ Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 307-7171. Aug. 13-14 at 8.)

SLAYER
Their peers in Metallica may have gone on to embrace the accoutrements of commercial acceptance (shorter haircuts, Armani wardrobes), but California's ferocious Slayer have never wavered from their mission of purist metal. They are the band of choice

for leather-clad, furrowed-brow zealots who like their music implausibly speedy, impossibly loud, and relentlessly bleak. (Roseland. Aug. 13-14 at 7:20.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BARBÈS
376 9th St., at Sixth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—Aug. 10: **Johnny Staats** and **Robert Shafer** provide a night of genuine old-time music. Staats is the mandolin virtuoso from West Virginia who achieved a small measure of fame a few years ago when he secured a record deal and decided not to give up his day job with U.P.S. It sounded like an act, but he's still on the road, both musically and as a deliveryman. He's joined by his fellow West Virginian Shafer, who's a two-time winner of the National Flatpicking Championship, on guitar.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—Aug. 9: They're only a week or so late, but that won't deter the **Zen Tricksters** from celebrating what would have been the Grateful Dead founder Jerry Garcia's sixtieth birthday. Aug. 13: The percussion madman (and Grateful Dead veteran) **Mickey Hart** brings in his Bembé Orisha.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Aug. 9: **Cornelius,** born Keigo Oyamada, has the sensibilities of a rogue producer. He takes jumbled rock elements and mixes them with samples and sound collages; the results are coherent songs. Just a cult figure here, Cornelius is much bigger in Japan, where his records have gone platinum. Aug. 10-11: The Doors once aspired to be as big as **Love;** decades later, fledgling bands still try to duplicate Love's formula of garage-punk drive, folk-rock jangle, and spacey lyricism. Famous for not performing outside of Los Angeles (the band even turned down an invitation to the Monterey Pop Festival), Arthur Lee, Love's lead singer and creative genius, spent the past few decades in obscurity (and the tail end of the millennium in prison). Now in the middle of an international tour, Lee was recently honored by the British Parliament (where M.P.s reportedly lined up to meet him), and the word on his shows in Europe is that he might be in his best form ever.

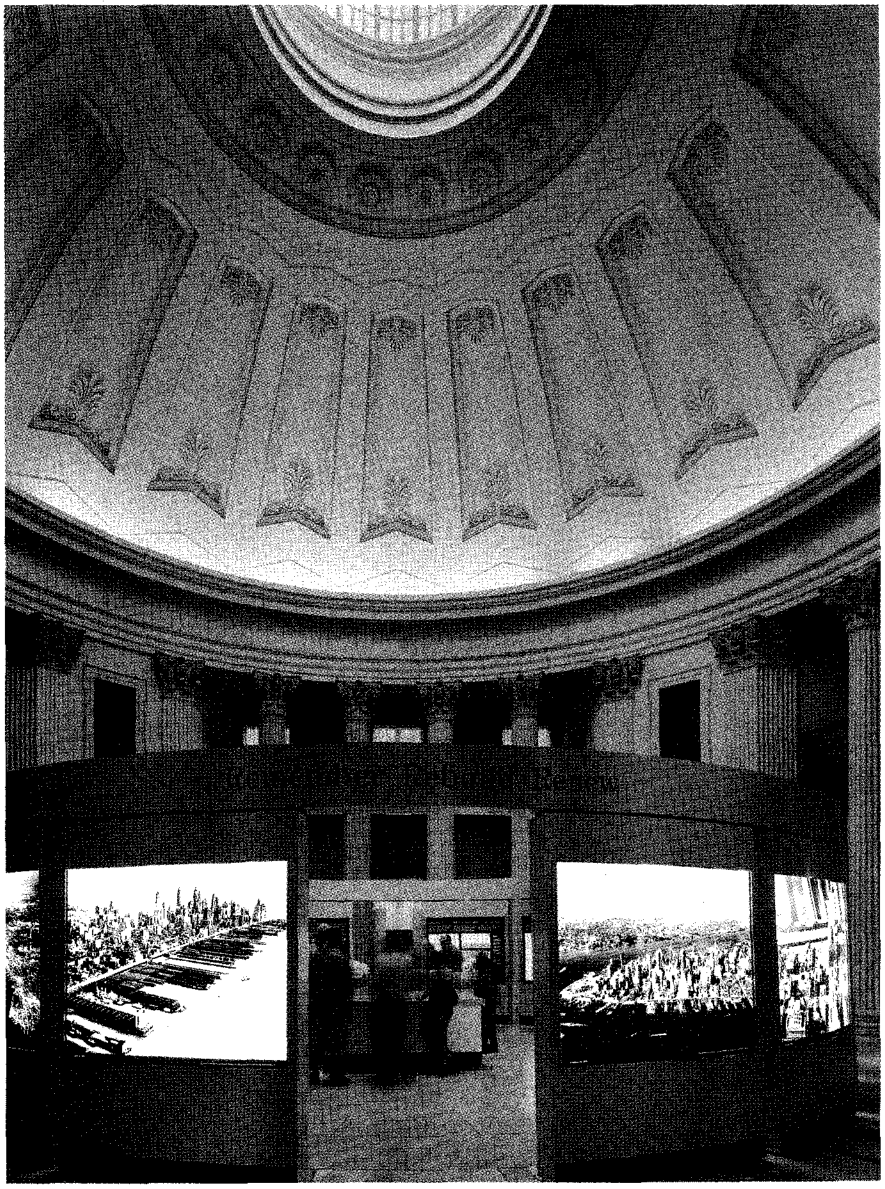
CUTTING ROOM
19 W. 24th St. (691-1900)—Aug. 9: Using an accordion, a guitar, a saxophone, a clarinet, and a trombone, the local ensemble the **Four Bags** coats Chopin mazurkas, familiar Beach Boys songs, and tender originals with odd textures and rhythms.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Aug. 10: **Filter,** an industrial-rock band sprung from the ranks of Nine Inch Nails. Aug. 13: **Tomahawk.** The inexhaustible Mike Patton, backed by an impressive squad of noise-rock veterans, has perfected a frenetic strain of rock and roll.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Aug. 10: **Nina Nastasia** is a singer-songwriter with an achingly lonesome voice and a dark, dark sensibility. The noted producer Steve Albini recorded her new album, "The Blackened Air." The record, which is layered with cello, accordion, violin, and guitar, covers such subjects as graveyards, desert flies, and ugly faces.

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-653-1703)—Aug. 10: **Mary Timony,** who started out as a D.C. punk rocker and logged a stint as the front woman for Helium, has recently been turning out a brand of progressive rock that is increasingly obsessed with ornate themes of fairies and mystical worlds. Her new album, "The Golden Dove," features many of the instruments you'd find at a Renaissance fair.

NOCHE
Broadway between 48th and 49th Sts. (541-7070)—Aug. 9: **Joselo** of the Grammy winners Café Tacuba is joined by **Fermin IV** of the Mexican hip-hop group Control Machete, the Spanish bad-girl rapper **La Mala Rodríguez,** and the veteran Spanish singer/personality **Alaska** and her band Fangoria.



"Ring of Remembrance," a showcase of the six proposals for the World Trade Center site, with images of the area from 1949 to now, at Federal Hall (see Galleries—Downtown).

ROBERT POLIDORI

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—Aug. 9: **Ely Guerra** (see Concerts—Celebrate Brooklyn!) plays a late-night show. Aug. 11: **Babasonicos** (see Concerts—Central Park SummerStage). Aug. 12: The stylish Cuban diva **Albita** moved to the States nearly ten years ago, and since then she's attracted a following right out of "Entertainment Tonight." Madonna, Gianni Versace, Sylvester Stallone, and Gloria Estefan all caught her regular, mid-nineties shows at the Centro Vasco restaurant, in Miami. Despite the celebrity appeal, Albita's heart lies with the earthy Cuban roots music known as *son.* Dining.

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (358-7501)—Aug. 9: The elegantly gritty instrumental trio **Big Lazy** stops by for a midnight show.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (353-1600)—Aug. 8: Latin alternative music's main organ, *La Banda Elástica,* celebrates its tenth anniversary with live music and its annual awards show. Performers include the Argentine rockers **Los Auténticos Decadentes,** the "tropipunk" Mexican ensemble **Los de Abajo,** the Brit-pop-tinged Miami act **Volumen Cero,** and **Joselo,** one of the Mexican genre-hoppers in Café Tacuba.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Aug. 8-10: Having played behind everyone and his brother (and sister) during the past four decades, the bassist **Buster Williams** is lately leading his own compact bands. His Something More quartet features the superlative young vibraphonist **Stefon Harris.** Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Aug. 18: For a player who first gained attention in Ornette Coleman's pianoless quartet some forty years ago, the great bassist **Charlie Haden** is often at his best duetting with pianists. Some of jazz's finest come out to celebrate Haden's sixty-fifth birthday, including **Kenny Barron** (Aug. 6-8), **Geri Allen** (Aug. 9-11), and the bassist's old compatriot **Paul Bley** on Aug. 13.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (582-2121)—Through Aug. 11: The **Steve Lacy/Roswell Rudd** quartet. The exacting soprano saxophonist Lacy and the blustery trombonist Rudd share a lifelong love for Thelonious Monk's quirky, beautiful music and the ability to slip in and out of the jazz tradition with gracious ease. They've played together only occasionally since the

sixties, and their reunions are not to be missed. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator Les Paul.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Through Aug. 11: The vocalist **Luciana Souza's** latest recording, "Brazilian Duos," finds her in beautiful accord with a host of superior guitarists, including **Romero Lubambo,** who accompanies her here on Aug. 6-8. Following that, Souza closes her run with a high-profile jazz quintet featuring the saxophonist **Steve Wilson** and the pianist **Bruce Barth.** Dining.

SMOKE
2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. (864-6662)—Aug. 9-10: The **Ralph Peterson** quintet. Sometimes the restraint that Peterson displays on his recordings gets left behind on his way to the drum set. He likes it loud, and usually surrounds himself with players tough enough to weather his barrage.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Aug. 11: Now that the Vanguard has cracked open its doors to vocalists, **Dianne Reeves** may receive more of the attention she deserves from hard-core jazz listeners. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"Gauguin in New York Collections: The Lure of the Exotic"** crowds the downstairs of the Robert Lehman wing with a few familiar masterpieces—the Met's "Ia Orana Maria (Hail Mary)," the Albright-Knox's "Manao Tupapau (Spirit of the Dead Watching)"—and many lesser paintings, drawings, sculptures, prints, documents, and oddities (portrait ceramic vessels, a carved walking stick representing a serpent and a wooden shoe). Saluting the Empire State's ravenous hunger for Gauguin, the unchoosy mélange affords a pungent sense of the artist's uneven, seductive mojo. Through Oct. 20. ♦ A magnificent retrospective of the works of Thomas Eakins (1844-1916), perhaps the greatest American artist before Abstract Expressionism, endorses the opinion of the artist's older friend and hero Walt Whitman: "Eakins is not a painter, he is a force." Cannily intermingled paintings, photographs, drawings, sculptures, and miscellaneous artifacts—such as grisly casts taken from parts of dissected cadavers—reveal the artist as a yeoman genius, strenuous in all things. Eakins made aesthetics sweat. It is astonishing how contemporary he feels today. Through Sept. 15. ♦ **"Adrian: American Glamour,"** an exhibition of the designs of Gilbert Adrian (1903-1959), at the Costume Institute. Through Aug. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City. (708-9480)—The museum's new home, until 2005, opens with a slew of shows perfect for the big, blue renovated factory building near the Fifty-ninth Street Bridge, including the ongoing **"To Be Looked At: Painting and Sculpture from the Collection,"** and **"AUTObodies: Speed, Sport, Transport,"** the museum's car collection. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—**"Moving Pictures."** When artists post production credits at the entrance to photography exhibitions (Gregory Crewdsen) or première their latest work at the Ziegfeld (Matthew Barney), it's clear that contemporary art has fallen under the spell of cinema. The Guggenheim tracks the seduction from the late sixties to the present in a rigorous and entertaining show of photography, film, and video from its permanent collection. The show opens whimsically in the lobby, with Nam June Paik's "TV Garden," dozens of monitors of varying sizes peeking out from a jungle of potted plants. It continues up the ramp chronologically, from early conceptual work by Acconci, Mendieta, and Nauman to a mini-multiplex: five small theatres screening works by young artists from Pierre Huyghe to Shirin Neshat. Through Jan. 12. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Joan Mitchell, the long-underrated second-generation Abstract Expressionist who died in 1992 at her home near Monet's Giverny, spoke paint. A sumptuous retrospective confirms her as a major artist. Mitchell's varieties of abstract landscape conjure nature (including the difficult human kind, in ornery and exacerbated moods) out of pigmented stuff with authoritative abandon. Lessons of Pollock, de Kooning, and, yes, Monet are apparent but thoroughly subsumed. As with great Monets, you sometimes can't tell what you are looking at. It's paint, sure, but as a medium of metaphysical mystery. Through Sept. 29. ♦ **"Visions from America: Photographs from the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1940-2001."** Through Sept. 22. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6; Fridays, 1 to 9.)

Arthur Lee brings back the seminal sixties rock band Love, at the Bowery Ballroom.

WHITNEY MUSEUM AT PHILIP MORRIS
120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (878-2550)—A pair of exhibitions treat the concrete corporate atrium as Toyland. Paul Henry Ramirez turns the white-cube side gallery into a walk-in painting. Bubbles and arabesques of hot pink and maroon swoop across the walls; parti-colored polka dots sprout fine, dark lines like oddly realistic hair, as if Dr. Seuss had grown up on Jugendstil design. Meanwhile, in the atrium, Teresita Fernandez hangs a canopy of translucent plastic poles, tinted blue and white, across the Forty-second Street entrance, a suspended river or solidified air current one must duck under. Stephen Hendee also favors translucent plastic—milky, corrugated sheets of it that form a sprawling crystal, lit from within in jewel tones that intensify as day dies down outside. Ester Partegàs is the odd woman out with an Oldenburg-like Chinese take-out bag that reaches nearly to the ceiling, complete with throw-rug-size receipt and eight-foot chopsticks. Through Oct. 11. (Open weekdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (423-3200)—First-century Jerusalem is given the field-trip treatment in **"Camels and Caravans: Daily Life in Ancient Israel,"** an educational show geared to grade-schoolers. Artifacts from the museum's collection—terra-cotta jugs, glass amphoras, a camel figurine—are displayed in vitrines beside hands-on exhibits that invite children to construct mosaics, dress in period costume, and sift through sand in an archeological dig. There's even a petting zoo of sorts: two cartoon cutouts of a ram and a ewe, both covered in sheepskin. Through June 2003. (Open Sundays 10 to 5:45, Mondays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
1 Bowling Green (514-3700)—Japan has its Living Treasures, and Mexico's Fomento Cultural Banamex has recently instituted a similar program, identifying a hundred and eighty-one living masters of traditional folk arts. In **"Great Masters of Mexican Folk Art,"** more than five hundred works by these artisans are displayed, from brilliantly painted ceramics to dazzling embroideries and gleaming silver. Items are arranged according to their materials, allowing comparison between different achievements in wood, wax, stone, tin, leather, beadwork, paper, and glass. Among the most amazing entries are a group of doll-house-size chairs exquisitely carved from horn by Luis Felipe Murillo Carrillo and Carlos Chacón Gómez and a pair of gold-and-flower-encrusted Day of the Dead skulls by Wenceslao Rivas Contreras, which look like polychromed marble but are actually molded sugar. Through March 15. ♦ **"Booming Out: Mohawk Iron Workers Build New York."** Through Oct. 15. (Open daily, 10 to 5, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
583 Broadway (219-1222)—Matisse said that art should be like an armchair; for the Brazilian Neo-Constructivist Hélio Oiticica, it's more like a private movie theatre. He pioneered the multimedia "environments" that led to installation art, and during a fertile period in New York City in 1973 he made a group of works he called "Quasi-Cinemas." Resurrected with the help of Oiticica's original collaborator, the Brazilian filmmaker Neville D'Almeida, the "Quasi-Cinemas" are interactive rooms—one filled with sleeping mats, one with balloons and sand, one crisscrossed with hammocks. Music plays as slides of various hipsters (Hendrix, Marilyn, a bevy of Brazilian transvestites) are projected onto the ceiling and the walls. Through Oct. 13. (Open Wednesdays and Sundays, noon to 6; Thursdays through Saturdays, noon to 8.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W. (873-3400)—For the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the American Society of Civil Engineers, the museum offers a tutorial called **"Me, Myself, and Infrastructure,"** which holds forth on engineering and the design and maintenance of the man-made world. The structures under investigation range from the near-invisible, like water mains and cell-phone towers, to the conspicuous, like dams and Wal-Marts. The show, originally scheduled for the World Financial Center this past spring, concludes with a professional disclaimer for the fall of the World Trade Center: "No skyscraper design could ever have taken into account the conditions of the September 11 attack." Similar apologias (there was "no way of recognizing" that the St. Francis Dam was built on weak rock) and political gambits (the federal government receives C's and D's on an infrastructure-maintenance report card) contribute to a sense that the show, which doesn't seem to know whether it's meant for adults or children, is slightly out of place at its present venue. Through Sept. 15. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Mexico City: An Exhibition About the Exchange Rates of Bodies and Values"** is the arch title of a visceral, important show. Videos, photography, and installations by nineteen Mexicans and resident foreigners peg Mexico City as the Weimar Berlin of our days, where urban adventurers

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

confront epic social chaos with ultra-dark irony and cosmopolitan élan. There's some rough stuff here: a room filled with a fog of water that was used to wash corpses in a morgue (it smells musty) and videotapes made by two sociopath artists of themselves stealing car stereos. Other works rankle more subtly, such as a portable version of Barnett Newman's "Broken Obelisk" made from the pink plastic tarpaulin typically used by Mexican street venders, by Eduardo Abaroa. The show's mordant wit echoes the rapturous fatalism of the recent terrific Mexican movies "Amores Perros" and "Y Tu Mamá También." Something rich and strange is afoot in Mexico City. Through Sept. 2. ♦ Between 1746 and 1755, Samuel Johnson wrote the first dictionary of the English language almost unaided. In the audio-visual installation **"Definition"** (2000), the young filmmaker and videographer Matthew Buckingham—whose work, like Johnson's, relies on an archive of arcane but useful knowledge—celebrates and affectionately mocks his elder's achievement. A single projected slide shows Johnson's empty, sunlit workroom. The gallery floor is steeply raked to mimic the slant of the garret's dormer window, while a recorded narrative (gorgeously read by novelist Patrick McGrath) explains Johnson's abecedarian exploits. It's like stepping into the cool hush of a grand library. Through Sept. 7. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (864-4500)—Beauford Delaney (1901-79) left Knoxville, Tennessee, for New York just in time for the Harlem Renaissance. Soon, he left again, along with other mid-century black expatriates, for Paris and the Riviera, where he spent the rest of his life exploring the expressive properties of canary, butter, lemon, and acid tones. For **"The Color Yellow: Beauford Delaney,"** twenty-nine canvases, painted from the late forties until his death, display his unusual palette preference. Delaney felt that yellow was a color of redemption; after seeing works like the massive and serene portrait of Marian Anderson (1965), one is inclined to agree. A few works in more agitated, Van Gogh-ish palette (bitter chartreuse and dark plum, for example) are less successful, as when a bright but choppy sea of brassy glow threatens to swallow up Ella Fitzgerald (1968). Through Sept. 22. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

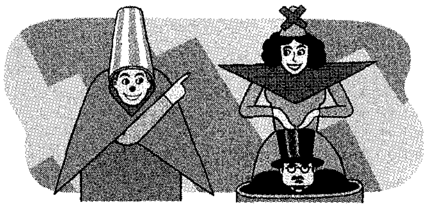
Summer-hours warning: many galleries are open Mondays through Fridays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. Others follow the normal Tuesday-to-Saturday schedule. It's best to call ahead.

NIC HESS AND JULIE MEHRETU / KORI NEWKIRK / WILLIAM POPE.L
In a show focussed on wall drawings, the team of Nic Hess and Julie Mehretu scores with a splashy, jagged extravaganza, spread across three sides of the room and slamming together graceful scribbles of dark ink, bright stripes of colored tape, a cresting Hokusai wave, and the iconic Air Jordan silhouette. Kori Newkirk plays white-on-white for its value as a pun, wiping a glistening, faintly bluish mix of hair pomade and salt across a blank plaster expanse. William Pope.L disdains such elusive maneuvers for the frankly scatological—a fragment of nastily suggestive text about domestic violence, and a trophy display of plush stuffed animals daubed to the wall with gobs of peanut butter. Through Aug. 18. (The Project, 427 W. 126th St. 662-8610.)

"BLUE + WHITE = RADICAL"
In the seventh century, Chinese ceramists added cobalt to their glazes, establishing a tradition that's now so strong that it drives artists to murder, albeit in effigy: Laszlo Fekete has recast broken Herend figurines, bleeding from their cracks. Fekete's compatriots lash out at the ubiquitous gentility of Ming, Delft, and Thomas Minton's Willow with, respectively, gilded assassination kits, sex toys, and Paul Scott's "Millennium Willow for Sellafield," which puts two nuclear reactors down in the middle of the classic landscape. Through Aug. 9. (Clark, 24 W. 57th St. 246-2205.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Art on the Edge



MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

"Kruchenykh and I have illustrated some books together which are selling very well," the Russian Futurist Olga Rozanova told her sister in 1913. Although the Futurists loved the mechanized look, their books were homemade, usually stapled, and sometimes decorated with potato stamps. **THE RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE BOOK 1910-1934** (Abrams) shows how Futurist graphics influenced the attempts of post-revolutionary Constructivists to make books that would be accessible even to the illiterate—a style that in turn informed early Soviet propaganda.

The avant-garde artists of Central Europe are less well known in the West than their Soviet counterparts; **CENTRAL EUROPEAN AVANT-GARDES: EXCHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION, 1910-1930** (M.I.T.) attempts to fill in the blanks by showcasing other artistic movements from Poznań to Bucharest. "Art must become international or it will perish," proclaimed the founders of the Congress of International Progressive Artists in 1922. They were challenged immediately by a mischievous Dadaist, who remarked, "You are neither international, nor progressive, nor artists."

For those who dare to enter the thicket of avant-garde manifestos, schools, and schisms, an accompanying volume, **BETWEEN WORLDS: A SOURCEBOOK OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN AVANT-GARDES, 1910-1930** (forthcoming from M.I.T.), contains some seven hundred pages of aesthetic dogma, much in English for the first time. "Manifesto," by the Romanian poet Saşa Pană, begins "readers, disinfect your brains," and proceeds to deliver a stream of exuberant, somewhat nonsensical free verse: "hurraaay hurraaay hurrraaaaaaay / the library trash is burning / a. et p. Chr. n. / 123456789000,000,000,000,000 kg / or rats get fat," and so on.

—Leo Carey

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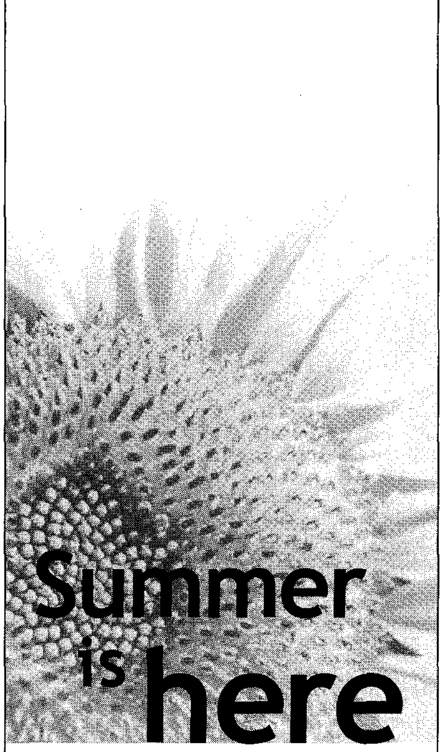

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For a complete calendar of events, locations, dates and times, please visit **jpmorganchase.com/summerarts**.

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"IMAGINE NEW YORK"
In the months following the attacks on the World Trade Center, the Municipal Art Society ran a series of community brainstorming seminars called "Imagine New York." Their volunteers asked, "What have we lost?," "How have we changed?," and "What is your vision of the future?" The answers they got appear here in edited form, reduced (to the point of absurdity) to forty-nine common visions—from "Make neighborhood more livable" to "Reassess U.S. foreign policy"—accompanied by selections from the 18,642 raw drawings, models, and ideas sketched by respondents. Through Oct. 10. (457 Madison Ave., at 51st St. 935-3960.)

"MANHATTAN AND MONHEGAN: A TALE OF TWO ISLANDS"
In the summer of 1903, Robert Henri fled Manhattan for Monhegan island, ten miles off the coast of Maine, a seasonal exodus still made by artists today. Here a century's worth of paintings pay homage to the intertwined history of the two locales, from Henri's rocky seascape to a small scene of Central Park by Arthur Cohen that was forty-one years in the making (it's dated 1960-2001). Most of the work follows in Henri's realist footsteps; notable exceptions include Reuben Tam's grisaille abstraction of frothy surf circa 1950 and a gleeful 1980 watercolor by Fred Mitchell of the Statue of Liberty ferry. Through Aug. 27. (David Findlay, Jr., 41 E. 57th St. 486-7660.)

"SUMMER"
A quartet of etchings by Inka Essenhigh—tendril-bearing, Walkman-wearing aliens on the beach—and a quartet of Roxy Paine's sandcastle/scatological "Scumak" sculptures—gloppy piles of red polyethylene extruded by the artist's own machine—anchor a show called "Summer," a collection of loosely sun-and-sea-related works. Sol LeWitt's wall drawing sheds a pale, warm light, and Fred Tomaselli stirs up a firestorm of pills, leaves, and slivers of pictures cut from magazines, while a multi-channel projection of a 1966 Bruce Baillie film looks back on better days—a leisurely pan across a brilliant sky and garden accompanied by Ella Fitzgerald singing "All My Life." Through Aug. 23. (James Cohan, 41 W. 57th St. 755-7171.)

GALLERIES–CHELSEA

DALZIEL + SCULLION / MARK DION / DAN GRAHAM
Two of these three *folies* seem designed for irony: Dalziel + Scullion puts solid aluminum tents in a park where people regularly bed down for the night, and Mark Dion presents a camouflaged "Urban Wildlife Observation Unit" in the limited ecosystem between Broadway and Madison. Only the two rooms of Dan Graham's glass slice-of-pie playhouse, "Bisected Triangle, Interior Curve," seem to fit in their surroundings, both in the material, smoked glass, and in the purpose, an homage to the Flatiron Building and the art of people-watching. Through Oct. 31. (Public Art Fund and Target Art in the Park, Madison Square Park, Fifth Ave. at 23rd St. 229-7607.)

"SOMETHING, ANYTHING?"
An enjoyable, very hip group show curated by the artist Nayland Blake that features raucous oddments in many mediums by dozens of contemporaries and a few honored dead. Some of the works are the kind of thing that artists make as jokes, for each other and for themselves; others evince the cracked sincerity of outsiders or the professional zaniness of comic-strip cartoonists (Ernie Bushmiller, George Herriman, Kaz). Serious works with wacky aspects (by Philip Guston, Ken Price, Cindy Sherman, and others) are dragooned into Blake's laughing academy to happily disorienting effect. The late Ray Johnson, the passive-aggressive "mail artist," seems to be the show's spectral guru, and Mike Kelley comes as no surprise. Reason? Taste? Never heard of them. But the installation, centered on a huge display console, emits fine visual smarts. In a back room, for the show's duration, a live d.j. spins vinyl from Blake's collection of more than three thousand LPs: that's a piece, too, titled "Ruins of a Sensibility, 1972-2002." Through Aug. 16. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-0200.)

Short List

SIOBHAN LIDDELL
CRG, 535 W. 22nd St. 229-2766.
Through Aug. 9.

JOAN MITCHELL
Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 242-7727.
Through Aug. 18.

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

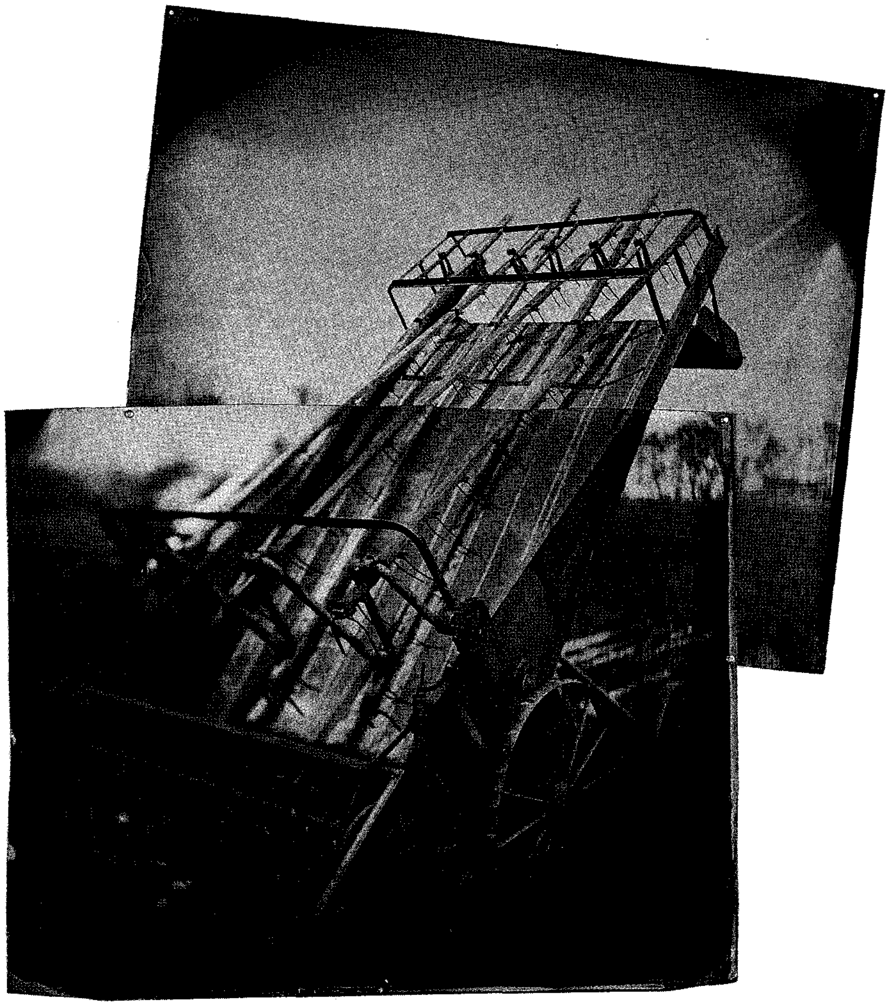
SEBASTIAN BLANCK
Blanck's New York début looks perfectly natural in a Miyake showroom: the set of nudes behind transparent polka-dotted shower curtains has the same peekaboo appeal as the designer's slinky outfits. The work's distinctive abstract overlay coyly obscures the nude forms, but it's easy to see who's scrubbing where. In one image, the perspective has cleverly shifted so that the artist looks out from inside the shower into a changing room—which perhaps explains the setting of the show, in the midst of crinkly Miyake silks. Through Aug. 31. (119 Hudson St. 226-0100.)

"ARTCHITECTURE"
In keeping with the roving exhibitions that established his reputation, curator Kenny Schachter has opened a temporary gallery in the West Village, while construction begins on a permanent home that will open in Chelsea next year. (Both spaces were designed by the artist Vito Acconci.) The inaugural exhibition is devoted to art and architecture, and the space itself steals the show. Inspired by the visionary designs of Frederick Kiesler (a model for his "Endless House" is on view), Acconci supplants the standard white cube with an undulating work in progress: walls of perforated metal, a ribbon of steel for a front desk, a curving ceiling that will eventually double as a projection screen. Through Aug. 9. (ConTEMPorary, 14 Charles Lane. 807-6669.)

"RING OF REMEMBRANCE"
The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, the ad-hoc state and city agency charged with the World Trade Center rebuilding efforts, displays land use proposals and maquettes of six plans for the site alongside photographs of the location from 1949 to the present. A three-dimensional animation of the plans plays continuously, and two tables (where viewers can write comments—the point of the exhibit) surround a model of Lower Manhattan with a transparent re-creation of the absent Towers. Through Aug. 30. (Federal Hall, 26 Wall St. 825-6888.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

JOHN COFFER
For the past twenty years, Coffer has crossed and recrossed the American continent in horse- and ox-drawn carts, seeking to master the long-lost art of the wet-plate collodion process, the world's most popular photographic method a hundred and forty years ago. While his large-format, hand-crafted tintypes recapture the haunting thrills of photography's beginnings, the dark glow of these images etched straight onto the surface of black enamelled iron conveys something more than the willful anachronism of a committed Luddite. Richly detailed exposures of humble woodpiles, kerosene lamps, and farm machinery convey a timeless reverence. "Milk Prayer," a self-portrait, reveals the



"Hayloader, Top and Bottom, 2," a tintype by John Coffer, at Melville.

TABLES FOR TWO

DELEGATES' DINING ROOM
First Ave. at 45th St. (963-7626)—It's not often that you have to pass through a metal detector to have lunch, but this is the United Nations, and these are wicked times. Despite the inconvenience, the Delegates' Dining Room, where buffet lunches are served on weekdays, is open to the public; all you need is a reservation and a photo I.D. Once you're in, a dour elevator attendant pilots you up to the dining room, otherwise known as Room 414. It may sound like a place where detainees get questioned, perhaps even roughly, but it is a civilized space: carpeted, soundproofed, and flooded with daylight. The commanding view of Turtle Bay inspires the usual talk of squandered waterfront acreage and unpaid parking tickets.

Who dines in Room 414? "An assortment of hangers-on and bureaucrats," said an old U.N. hand, whose time abroad had left him bitter. He pointed to an African man in a dark business suit. "I was with that guy in Somalia and Liberia." Chances are that in a hundred visits to Burger Heaven you would not overhear the words "Suez Canal" or "There's Radovic," but such is the table talk here. The dress code calls for a jacket or native costume; on a good day, the place recalls the cantina in "Star Wars."

The chef occasionally throws two-week festivals (in October the focus will be on the cuisines of Poland and Peru), but the buffet's the thing; the food is good, and it gives you the chance to make multiple trips through international table space. The offerings change daily, and while one dish or another might offend certain delegates no one is likely to go hungry. At the first table there might be cucumber salad, tabbouleh, fish pâté, pork pâté, white-bean soup. At the second: braised short ribs, dill salmon with lemon beurre blanc, chicken tikka. At the third: pork loin with a mandarin-orange sauce, and a pot of veal blanquette. And last, a dessert layout for the diplomatically immune: blueberry crumb cake, apple tart, cheeses, chocolates. Grab one of the big plates and pile it high. And don't forget to fill your pockets with packets of sugar. ("United Nations Sugar," they read, in Blue Helmet blue.) (Open weekdays for lunch. Buffet $22.)

—*Nick Paumgarten*

emotional depth of Coffer's soft-spoken, spiritual aesthetic. Through Oct. 10. (Melville, 213 Water St. 748-8600.)

HARRY LAPOW
These stills chronicle Lapow's three decades of Coney Island beachcombing. Biddies play cards, couples neck, oil-slathered hipsters of all ages smoke everything imaginable, and a raw taxonomy of the human form broils, dead asleep in the sun. For all their humor and personality, these vintage prints avoid the pitfalls of caricature and deliver small-scale emotional truths, from genuine friendship ("Milk Crate Couple") to unalloyed lust ("Spandex Embrace"), from sadness and stoicism ("Man with Retarded Girl"), to palpable isolation ("Boardwalk Walker"). Through Aug. 16. (Klotz/Sirmon, 511 W. 25th St. 741-4764.)

"INTO THE WOODS"
In the front gallery, a creepy still-life sculpture by Alyson Shotz shoots heavenward like a Cronenberg version of Jack's beanstalk, setting the stage for this engaging and often frightening show of fairy-tale-inspired art. About half of the nearly fifty works on view are photographs, from an anonymous image from 1858 of an actress dressed as a fairy to Beverly Semmes's eerie shot of crimson fabric pooled voluptuously on the forest floor—Red Riding Hood disappeared. Through Aug. 16. (Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 627-2410.)

Short List

SEBASTIÃO SALGADO
Burden, 20 E. 23rd St. 505-5555.
Through Aug. 16.

ERNEST WITHERS
Gallery 292, 120 Wooster St. 431-0292.
Through Aug. 16.

"ABOUT FACE"
Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.
Through Aug. 23.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SWANN
Aug. 7 at 10:30 A.M. and 2: Vintage posters, including summer-travel images, commercial advertising, and patriotic propaganda from the First and Second World Wars. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

NEW YORK GRAND OPERA: "LE VILLI"
Before Mimi's hands went cold, and long before Tosca raised her knife in fury, Puccini brought his lyric gifts to his first opera, premièred in 1884, which has never entered the repertory. Perhaps the fault lies not in the music, in which Puccini's splendrous voice begins to emerge from the influences of Ponchielli, Massenet, and Bizet, but in the flat story, a "Freischütz"-like tale of young love, betrayal, and the supernatural set in a village in the Black Forest. (Adam used it some forty years before, for his ballet "Giselle.") Vincent La Selva, who conducted the work's first New York performance, in 1984, brings it once more to Central Park; the opera's two brief acts are complemented by a selection of Puccini's orchestral music, including the ravishing "Crisantemi," for strings. Hallie Neill, Pablo Veguilla, and Raemond Martin take the leading roles; Jan Holland is the director. (SummerStage, Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. Aug. 7 at 7:30. No tickets required.)

BERKSHIRE OPERA COMPANY
Joel Revzen conducts Britten's **"The Turn of the Screw,"** with an impressive young cast that includes Jennifer Alymer, Elizabeth Shammash, Mary Ann McCormick, and Carl Halvorson. (Mahaiwe Theatre, 14 Castle St., Great Barrington, Mass. 413-644-9988. Aug. 7 at 2 and Aug. 9 at 8. These are the final performances.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA
Aug. 8 at 8, Aug. 10 at 1:30, and Aug. 13 at 2: Tazewell Thompson's new production of Poulenc's **"Dialogues of the Carmelites,"** with Maria Kanyova, Joyce Castle, Robynne Redmon, Sarah Coburn, Anne Evans, and Jason Collins; the conductor is Stewart Robertson. ♦ Aug. 9 at 8 and Aug. 12 at 2: At first glance, Mark Adamo's **"Little Women"** seems like yet another unadventurous American opera based on a famous novel, movie, or play. But Adamo's affecting adaptation of the Louisa May Alcott classic (for which he wrote his own libretto) is a spirited work, whose sometimes predictable stylistic moves disappear into an effortless narrative flow. The Glimmerglass production has potent charm, with Jennifer Dudley, Sandra Piques Eddy, and Joshua Hopkins showing strong young voices in the leads; John DeMain. ♦ Aug. 10 at 8: Haydn's **"Orlando Paladino,"** with Lisa Saffer, Brenda Patterson, Paul Austin Kelly, and Troy Cook; Guido Johannes Rumstadt. In English. ♦ Aug. 11 at 2: Robin Guarino's production of **"Pagliacci"** and **"Cavalleria Rusticana,"** featuring Marie Plette, John Mac Master, and Ned Barth in the first opera and Eugenie Grunewald, Keith Ikaia-Purdy, and Brian Montgomery in the second; Robertson. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

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CONCERTS IN TOWN

BARGEMUSIC
Aug. 8 at 7:30 and Aug. 11 at 4: Chamber music by Beethoven, Martinů, and Schubert (the Trio in E-Flat Major, Op. 100), with the violinist Christiaan Bor, the cellist Ronald Thomas, and the pianist Eduard Auer. ♦ Aug. 9-10 at 7:30: The pianist Judith Gordon and the cellist Sarah Carter perform a recital of Beethoven, Bach, and Brahms (the Cello Sonata No. 2 in F Major). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL
Although as of press time the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra's appearances have been cancelled, the festival is proceeding with the concerts of its guest ensembles. The music of Handel, much admired by the Salzburg wunderkind, emerges this week as one of the festival's big themes. Aug. 8 at 8: Dmitri Hvorostovsky and the Moscow Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Constantine Orbelian, make their festival débuts. The riveting Russian baritone will start off with "Ombra mai fù," from "Serse" (known to fans of "Our Town" as Handel's Largo), but a group of arias by Mozart (from "Don Giovanni") *and a selection of Neapolitan songs are the real* heart of this concert. Instrumental music by Mozart, Piazzola, and Boccherini completes the program. (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Aug. 10 at 3: Authentic performance practice is one thing, but few pianists take as many liberties with Classical repertory as Robert Levin, whose elaborate employment of embellishments and improvisations has given him an honored, if lonely, place on the radical fringe (not to mention a professorship at Harvard). He's the featured soloist (on the fortepiano) in an all-Beethoven concert given by the conductor Louis Langrée and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, performing the Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major and the "Choral Fantasy" (with the Riverside Choral Society assisting). The Symphony No. 7 in A Major completes the program. (Alice Tully Hall.) ♦ Aug. 11 at 5: "Acis and Galatea," Handel's brief, first opera in English, has a small cast, a comic touch, and a simple rustic theme, all of which make it ideal for concert performances. Christine Brandes, who led the cast of City Opera's staging of 2001, brings her talents to a performance by San Francisco's Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, conducted by Nicholas McGegan; the singers John Mark Ainsley, Michael Slattery, and Philip Cutlip are also featured, assisted by the Dessoff Choirs. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500.)

CONCERTS OUT OF TOWN

CARAMOOR FESTIVAL
Westchester's little Tanglewood ends its summer series with an eclectic group of offerings. Aug. 6-8 at 8:15: Steve Ross, the dapper prince of Manhattan's cabaret rooms, takes a trip to the suburbs to perform standards by his two favorite songwriters, Cole Porter and Noël Coward. The concerts, with table seating and champagne, are preceded by a dinner at 6:15. ♦ Aug. 9 at 8: The young musicians of the Caramoor Virtuosi play chamber works by Schubert, Brahms (the Piano Quintet in F Minor), and others. ♦ Aug. 10 at 2: An all-day concert of jazz with such artists as Benny Green, Russell Malone, the Charles McPherson quartet, and Louis Hayes and the Cannonball Legacy Band. ♦ Aug. 11 at 4:30: A whole orchestra of Caramoor Virtuosi, conducted by Peter Oundjian, takes the stage at the Venetian Theatre for a grand finale of string music by Mozart, Beethoven, and Strauss (the "Metamorphosen"). The highlight is "Last Round," by Osvaldo Golijov, a raucous yet mournful tribute, for two duelling string quartets and a double bass, to the fistfight-loving tango legend Astor Piazzolla. (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252.)

BRIDGEHAMPTON CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
The festival's second week of concerts, including music by Dvořák, Franck, Scarlatti, and Steve Reich, features performances by such musicians as the violinist Ani Kavafian, the cellist John Sharp, and the pianist André-Michel Schub. (Bridgehampton Presbyterian Church. 631-537-6368. Aug. 7 and Aug. 10 at 8 and Aug. 11 at 6:30.)

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA
Charles Dutoit conducts four programs of Beethoven. Aug. 7: Gil Shaham solos in the Violin Concerto, followed by a performance of the Symphony No. 7. ♦ Aug. 8: The Piano Concerto No. 1 (with Martha Argerich) and the Symphony No. 3 ("Eroica"). ♦ Aug. 9: Argerich teams up with the violinist Ida Haendel and the cellist Mischa Maisky for a performance of the Triple Concerto. The program also includes the "Leonore" Overture No. 3 and the Symphony No. 5. ♦ Aug. 10: Yefim Bronfman brings his spectacular style to the Piano Concerto No. 5 ("Emperor"), while the singers Pamela Coburn, Sonia Racine, Stanford Olsen, Stephen Powell, and the Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia assist in a performance of the Ninth Symphony. (Saratoga Performing Arts Center, Saratoga, N.Y. 518-587-3330. All concerts begin at 8:15.)

TANGLEWOOD
Aug. 7 at 8:30: The baritone Wolfgang Holzmair and the pianist Imogen Cooper, one of the most sensitive and persuasive art-song teams around, split up to perform music by Mahler ("Songs of a Wayfarer," in Schoenberg's chamber version) and Mozart (the Piano Concerto No. 18 in B-Flat Major), with Joseph Swensen and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. Schubert's Symphony No. 3 completes the program. ♦ Aug. 9 at 8:30: Neeme Järvi conducts the Boston Symphony Orchestra in music by Beethoven (the Violin Concerto, with Joshua Bell) and Shostakovich (the Fifth Symphony). ♦ Aug. 10 at 8:30: Osmo Vänskä, the new music director of the Minnesota Orchestra, leads the B.S.O. in a concert pairing symphonies and vocal works by Beethoven (the Eighth Symphony and the concert aria "Ah! Perfido,") and Sibelius (the Fifth Symphony and the folk legend "Luonnotar"). Karita Mattila, the radiant Finnish soprano, assists. ♦ Aug. 11 at 2:30: Järvi returns, leading a program of Russian warhorses, Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto (with Gil Shaham) and Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5. ♦ Aug. 12 at 8:30: The vocal fellows of the Tanglewood Music Center, conducted by Federico Cortese, perform a concert version of Bernstein's "Trouble in Tahiti." (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

MOHAWK TRAIL CONCERTS
One doesn't think of Ennio Morricone, the composer of scores for such films as "A Fistful of Dollars" and "Cinema Paradiso," as a chamber-music specialist, but his music, intimately arranged, provides the finishing touch to this crazy-quilt concert by the Archguitar Duo and the tenor Peter Shea, in the last performances of Mohawk's summer series. The program, based in lute music by Dowland, also includes arrangements of American music by Foster, Joplin, and Woody Guthrie. (Hills Chapel, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. Aug. 9 at 8. ♦ Federated Church, Charlemont, Mass. Aug. 10 at 8.) (For tickets to both concerts, call 888-682-6873.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
Aug. 9 at 8: "The Floating World," a concert by the wind quintet Windscape that combines music by Debussy and Ravel and by Japanese composers with slide projections of ukiyo-e and French Impressionist paintings. ♦ Aug. 10 at 8: The Tokyo String Quartet, with the pianist Peter Frankl and the violist Jesse Levine, performs music by Dvořák and Brahms (the String Quintet in G Major). (Routes 44 and 272, Norfolk, Conn. 860-542-3000.)

BARD MUSIC FESTIVAL: "MAHLER AND HIS WORLD"
Two weekends of concerts and pre-concert panels presented by conductor and Bard College president Leon Botstein. Here are some highlights. Aug. 9 at 8:30: A concert of songs by Mahler (three of the "Rückert Lieder" and Schoenberg's arrangement of "Songs of a Wayfarer," with the singers Nancy Maultsby and Leon Williams, respectively), along with his arrangements of music by Bruckner (the Scherzo of the Third Symphony, with the pianists Jeremy Denk and Melvin Chen) and Bach. (Olin Auditorium.) ♦ Aug. 10 at 8:30: Botstein conducts the Symphony No. 2 ("Resurrection"), with the singers Jane Jennings and Elisabeth Canis, the American Symphony Orchestra, and the New York Virtuoso Singers. (Festival Tent.) ♦ Aug. 11 at 5: "Mahler and Friends," a concert of songs and string quartets, combining music by Mahler with pieces by his conservatory chums Hans Rott and Hugo Wolf (who would both go mad while Mahler was hitting his stride). The performers include the tenor John Horton Murray, the pianist Dennis Helmrich, and the Hugo Wolf Quartet. (Olin Auditorium.) (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7456. For a complete listing of concerts, go to the festival's Web site, www.bard.edu/bmf.)

MARLBORO FESTIVAL
The venerable chamber-music collaborative continues its weekend concerts. Programs are announced on the festival's Web site, www.marlboromusic.org. (Marlboro, Vt. 802-254-2394. Aug. 9-10 at 8:30 and Aug. 11 at 2:30.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS
Aug. 10 at 8: Joan Tower may be the first major American composer since Walter Piston who never writes for human voices, but her music for instrumentalists (she's a superb pianist herself) is so sympathetically written that we always hear her own voice coming through. The Hudson Valley composer—whose music, like Copland's, is strong, clear, decisive, and humane—enjoys a Maverick tribute, with performances by the Cassatt and Colorado String Quartets (and by Tower as well). ♦ Aug. 11 at 3: The Shanghai String Quartet performs three Beethoven quartets (including the "Serioso" and the second Razumovksy Quartet). (Woodstock, N.Y. 845-679-8217.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
A program of Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Brahms (the Piano Quintet), performed by the Da Ponte String Quartet and the pianist Pamela Mia Paul. (Routes 63 and 126, Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. Aug. 11 at 3.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"WE LOVE NEW YORK"
Eyebeam, a nonprofit organization dedicated to art work created with computers and other digital media, presents an exhibition subtitled "Mapping Manhattan with Artists and Activists." Graphic Information Systems maps display demographic, economic, and social trends throughout the city. No minuscule back-seat-of-a-taxi graphics here: a hundred-foot-long map of Manhattan covers the gallery floor, marking the parts of the borough that are currently under surveillance. Workshops and classes encourage viewer participation: on the opening day, Aug. 8, for example, members of the Institute for Applied Autonomy lead walking tours at noon and 6 of Manhattan using handheld devices to locate security cameras. The information gathered will be used to update the map in the gallery. (540-548 W. 21st St. For more information, call 718-222-3982, ext. 22. Through Aug. 24.)

READINGS
Aug. 6 at 7:30: Darin Strauss, Lawrence Weschler, A. M. Homes, and James Wagner offer passages from their work and from their contributions to the latest issue of the literary journal *McSweeney's*. The local band One Ring Zero provides the music. (Kraine Theatre, 85 E. 4th St. Tickets at the door.) ♦ Aug. 13 at 7: Avery Brooks, Keith David, Russell Hornsby, Kevin Jackson, Kerry Washington, and Lilias White celebrate the work of Zora Neale Hurston, with an alfresco reading from "Every Tongue Got to Confess," her recently discovered and recently published collection of African-American folktales. (Central Park SummerStage, Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. 360-2777.)

MOVIES OPENING

BLOOD WORK
In a thriller he also directed, Clint Eastwood plays an F.B.I. profiler brought back from retirement to catch a serial killer. Opening Aug. 9.

THE CHÂTEAU
A comedy in which two American brothers (Paul Rudd and Romany Malco) inherit a French estate that includes an attractive maid (Sylvie Testud) and a butler (Didier Flamand). In French and English. Opening Aug. 9. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE CITY OF LOST SOULS
Takashi Miike ("Audition") directed this action picture about a Japanese-Brazilian bandit and his Chinese girlfriend (Michelle Reis) who are on the run from the yakuza. In Japanese. Opening Aug. 8. (Anthology Film Archives.)

THE GOOD GIRL
A black comedy with Jennifer Aniston, who plays a married Texas woman having an affair with a younger co-worker (Jake Gyllenhaal) at the superstore where she works. With Zooey Deschanel and John C. Reilly. Opening Aug. 7.

SCARLET DIVA
Asia Argento plays a young actress who wants to be cast in serious roles and given a chance to direct, in a semiautobiographical movie she wrote and directed. Opening Aug. 9. (Cinema Village.)

SECRET BALLOT
Babak Payami's satirical comedy about an idealistic Iranian election official who collects votes from apathetic villagers on a remote island. In Farsi. Opening Aug. 9. (Eastside Playhouse and Quad Cinema.)

SPY KIDS 2: THE ISLAND OF LOST DREAMS
In this sequel to last summer's action-movie hit, Carmen (Alexa Vega) and Juni (Daryl Sabara) are challenged by another pair of super-spy siblings. Opening Aug. 7.

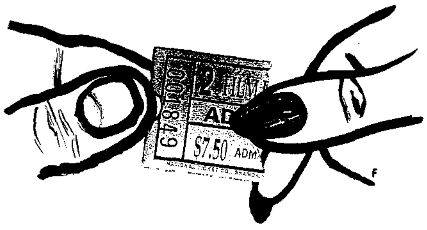
24 HOUR PARTY PEOPLE
A movie about the rock-and-roll life of Tony Wilson (Steve Coogan), who founded Factory Records and worked with such bands as Joy Division, Happy Mondays, and the Stone Roses. Michael Winterbottom directed. Opening Aug. 9.

XXX
An extreme-sports outlaw (Vin Diesel) is recruited by the U.S. government to infiltrate a Russian crime syndicate, in a thriller directed by Rob Cohen ("The Fast and the Furious.") With Samuel L. Jackson and Asia Argento. Opening Aug. 9.

FILM NOTES

AUSTIN POWERS IN GOLDMEMBER
Comedic comfort food. After a spectacular opening salvo (loaded with cameos), the third installment of the swinging-spy shag-ology settles into familiar terrain: Dr. Evil (one of the four roles played by Mike Myers) doing his nefarious best to take over the world. Once again, Myers displays his gift for mimicry and his ability to mix it up with a midget. His cast includes an electric Beyoncé Knowles as his female sidekick and a dapper yet underused Michael Caine as his dad; they're ebullient foils to the script's formless frenzy.—*Bruce Diones* (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

BOB & CAROL & TED & ALICE
A lively, unabashedly commercial comedy on the subject of modern sexual mores—the first feature directed by Paul Mazursky. The period is 1969, when the concept of legal marriage is being undermined and Southern California middle-class people are culturally uneasy about clinging to something square, and personally tantalized by what they're missing. The film contrasts the marriage of Robert Culp, as a documentary filmmaker, and his wife, Natalie Wood, with the mismatch of Dyan Cannon and her lawyer husband, Elliott Gould. Wood is the wrong kind of actress for this material, but the scenes involving Gould and Cannon are small miracles of timing; Cannon (who looks a bit like Lauren Bacall and a bit like Jeanne Moreau, but the wrong bits) is also remarkably funny in her scenes with an analyst.—*Pauline Kael* (Moving Image; Aug. 11.)

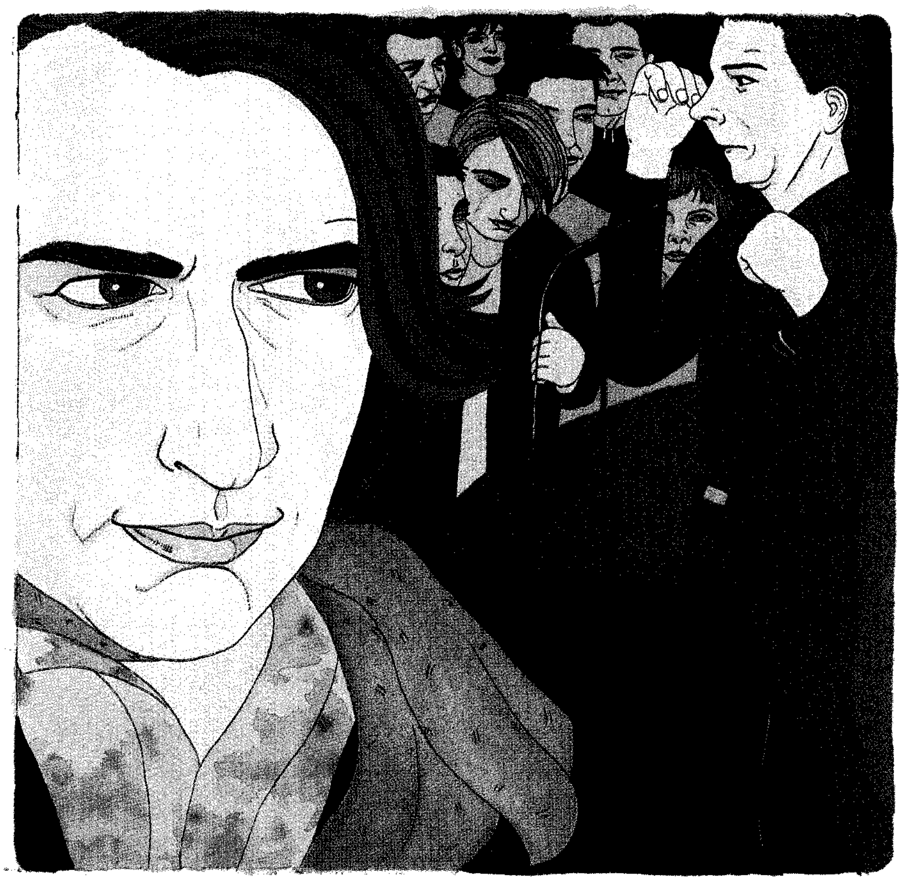


THE CRIME OF MONSIEUR LANGE
An ode to France's Popular Front and to popular art, this 1936 film has the shape and bittersweet flavor of a modern fable. Lange (René Lefèvre), an aspiring serial writer, slaves for a greedy publisher named Batala (Jules Berry); after Batala is reportedly killed in a train wreck, his employees form a coöperative, and Lange's cowboy creation, Arizona Jim, becomes a smash in a photo-and-text format. Everyone poses as Lange's characters: fellow-workers, beautiful laundresses, an irascible concierge. Then Batala comes back as Lange's friends and colleagues coalesce into a perky, unpredictable group hero. But the greatness of the director, Jean Renoir, and the screenwriter, Jacques Prévert, is best exemplified by the complexity and charm of their villain. In his rapacious wisdom, seductiveness, and cunning use of disguise, Berry's Batala prefigures Peter Sellers's Quilty in "Lolita." In French.—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade; Aug. 12-13.)

EIGHT LEGGED FREAKS
A throwback to those paranoid after-the-A-bomb flicks of the fifties like "Them" and "The Crawling Eye," this silly movie about giant spiders menacing an Arizona town tries to rework familiar material by treating it in an offhand, sardonic way. Nice try. Still, David Arquette, Kari Wuhrer, and the always sublime Scarlett Johansson deal with the musty genre conventions good-naturedly, and the computer-generated arachnids are reasonably entertaining.—*B.D.* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE FAST RUNNER (ATANARJUAT)
A three-hour marathon of ice, snow, and raw seal meat. This Inuit epic is quite a trek, but many of the visual sequences—the Arctic in summer and winter—are sublime and unprecedented. A ten-minute episode showing the hero, Atanarjuat, running across a frozen sea has been hailed, justifiably, as a masterstroke, but there are many other discoveries, like sunshine filtering through the cracks of an igloo and the gray-on-gray polar horizon. Directed by the Inuit filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk, the movie's straight-arrow tale of murder and revenge carries it through the more tedious "Nanook of the North" moments. But even these digressions—for example, scenes that show the way the Inuit greet each other, carry themselves, and cut their food—stay with you. At the extreme north, the basic motions of life somehow seem startling and fresh. In Inuktitut.—*Michael Agger* (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

FULL FRONTAL
Steven Soderbergh and the screenwriter Coleman Hough have attempted a neo-Godardian deconstruction of cinematic reality, but the movie turns deconstruction into hash. Actors play actors who are making a movie within the movie, but half the time we can't tell whether we're in the inner or outer movie or why we should care. There are a few intense moments in which Julia Roberts, playing a magazine reporter, flirts with Blair Underwood, who plays a handsome black TV actor hoping to get his big break, but the scenes don't go anywhere. Neither does Catherine Keener's smoldering rage as a personnel director who, for some reason, throws a plastic globe at her company's employees and asks them to name the countries in Africa. The movie is the sort of whimsical and arbitrary mess that gives experimentation a bad name. With David Duchovny (very briefly), Mary McCormack, and David Hyde Pierce.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in

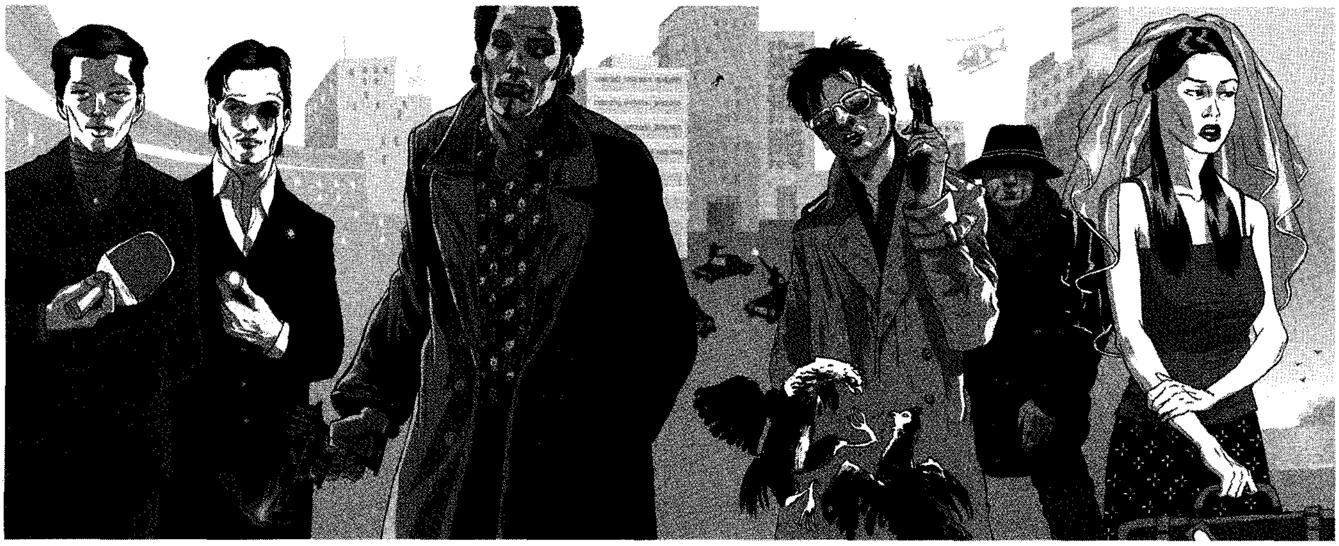


Steve Coogan in "24 Hour Party People," a film about the Manchester music scene.

LARA TOMLIN

our issue of 8/5/02.) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, and Lincoln Square.)

I AM TRYING TO BREAK YOUR HEART
The director Sam Jones set out to document the acclaimed rock band Wilco, and his film, which was intended to be a watchin'-the-boys-at-work-in-the-studio lark, turned into something more striking. Over the course of recording the group's current album, the original and brilliant "Yankee Hotel Foxtrot," the singer-songwriter Jeff Tweedy has to deal with two members leaving the band, and his label, Reprise, rejecting the album. The happy, ironic ending does nothing to dilute the movie's air of brooding introspection. Jones's film comes off as a rare portrait of an artistic breakthrough, catching the pressures that can drive a band to perform at the height of its powers.—*B.D.* (Cinema Village.)



A mini-retrospective of Takashi Miike's films at Anthology Film Archives opens with the New York début of "The City of Lost Souls."

TOMER HANUKA

THE KID STAYS IN THE PICTURE
Before Robert Evans was discovered at a Hollywood swimming pool by the aging Norma Shearer, he was a garmento from New York with swarthy good looks and the confidence of a lion. Thrust into pictures in his twenties, Evans quickly became the head of production at Paramount, where he played a significant role in generating such classics as "Rosemary's Baby," "The Godfather," and "Chinatown." In the seventies, Evans fell in with the high-rolling hipster élite, including Jack Nicholson and Warren Beatty, and became famous for both his gutsy, stand-by-the-talent decisions and his outsized appetites for beautiful women and cocaine. The movie is a celebratory narrative of Evans's life, composed of newsreel footage, stills, and haunting shots of his mansion in various states of glory and disrepair. Evans himself narrates in his gravelly voice: his speech is a cross between hardboiled rhetoric and the traditional crass-but-with-heart bullying of Hollywood power types. He comes off as a preposterously likable man, though the movie is so one-sided that you never get the truth of any situation that it touches on.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

K-19: THE WIDOWMAKER
Nobody knows what happened, but somehow the Kathryn Bigelow who directed "The Loveless" and "Point Break"—hip, stylized, and about as solemn as a surfboard—has grown into someone who makes long, worthy films on such topics as what to do when your nuclear reactor springs a leak. This new picture stars Harrison Ford, who seems to have bitten off more of a Russian accent than he can chew, as the captain of a Soviet submarine. He is seconded, not without rivalry, by Liam Neeson; their looming standoff never quite happens, and the same feels true of the whole tale. Cleaving solidly to its factual basis, (the real K-19 was launched in 1961), the film tells thrillingly of a war that didn't break out and a vessel that never sank. The dialogue has a clanging, Cold War rigidity, which may explain why the camera keeps scurrying, as if by way of compensation, through the iron burrows of the sub. No one can deny the cautionary lesson that Bigelow delivers on the perils of radiation, but most people will crave more thrills to go with their nasty spills.—*Anthony Lane* (7/29/02) (Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, 19th Street East 6, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

LOVELY & AMAZING
A comedy about self-dissatisfaction, featuring a mother and three daughters in Los Angeles. Jane Marks (Brenda Blethyn), the mom, undergoes liposuction and flirts with her doctor; Michelle (Catherine Keener), stuck in a loveless marriage, can't sell the little chair sculptures that she makes; Elizabeth (Emily Mortimer), an actress, thinks that she's ugly and encourages her bedmate, a narcissistic actor (Dermot Mulroney), to judge her naked body, limb by limb; Annie (Raven Goodwin), an African-American girl adopted by Jane, worries over her hair. The writer-director Nicole Holofcener has a gentle touch, though she doesn't pull her themes together as much as one would like. The movie is intelligent and funny but a little unfocussed.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 2, and Empire 25.)

MINORITY REPORT
A frantic return to form for Steven Spielberg, whose pulse seems to have quickened after the sluggish musings of "A.I." We are still stuck in the future, but it comes with a twist from the mazelike mind of Philip K. Dick. Tom Cruise plays John Anderton, a bright spark in the shadowy field of Precrime. With a little help from three oracles known as the Pre-Cognitives, he is able to predict, and therefore to prevent, approaching murders. The homicide rate has plunged, although the monitoring official from the Justice Department (Colin Farrell) looks worried about the ethics of the program. Where "A.I." was a wandering quest, this is a straightforward chase, as Anderton finds himself accused and hunted down. Spielberg is able to flex those muscles—his ridiculous powers of suspense—that threw him so hard into the movie business in the first place. Like "Jaws," the new film is none too serious, though it is forever touching on serious things.—*A.L.* (7/1/02) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.)

MY WIFE IS AN ACTRESS
The lovely Charlotte Gainsbourg stars with her husband, Yvan Attal, in this French comedy—a slow burn about the art and illusion of moviemaking. Gainsbourg plays an adored actress, a sexy siren, and Attal plays her husband, a sportswriter who is driven to comically neurotic and jealous heights by her work on the screen. The screwball set-up is played very gracefully—Gainsbourg and Attal are so appealing together that their lines dance around each other rather than provide pratfalls. In French.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

RASHOMON
In ninth-century Kyoto, a nobleman's bride is raped by a bandit; the nobleman is murdered, or possibly he is a suicide. This double crime is acted out four times, in the versions of the three participants, each giving an account that increases the prestige of his conduct, and in the version of a woodcutter who witnessed the episode. Continuously reconstructing the crime, "Rashomon" asks, How can we ever know the truth? This great enigmatic 1951 film was directed by Akira Kurosawa, from stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa (who died from an overdose of Veronal). The introductory and closing sequences are tedious; the woman's whimpering is almost enough to drive one to the nearest exit. Yet the film transcends these discomforts: it has its own perfection. In Japanese.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Aug. 7-10.)

READ MY LIPS
A half-deaf but observant secretary (Emmanuelle Devos), who reads people's lips and attitudes and feels like a loser, and a mangy ex-con (Vincent Cassel), with a blank look in his eyes and an endless capacity for trouble, make a very odd couple. But the writer-director Jacques Audiard, working close to his actors with a camera devoted to glances, reactions, and tiny gestures, gets us to believe that these two hard cases are destined for each other. The woman requires some waking up, a little danger or excitement, if she is not to expire from boredom and depression; the man needs some sense talked into him if he is not to be sent straight back to prison. They form an alliance and renew themselves by ripping off unsavory characters. The movie turns into a breathless and rather audacious study in the sexiness of a nonsexual relationship. In French.—*D.D.* (7/15/02) (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

ROAD TO PERDITION
A solemnly beautiful art concept—which is not quite the same thing as a great movie. The talented English director Sam Mendes ("American Beauty"), along with his collaborators, the cinematographer Conrad L. Hall and the veteran costume designer Albert Wolsky, draw their visual ideas and moods from old movies and comic books, distilling the memory of crime fiction—rather than the memory of crime—into imagery that could not be more iconic. Tom Hanks plays a Depression-era mob assassin, a family man with a small moustache and a stiff walk. He moves through a stylized world of fedoras, long dark coats, and thick-woven suits; there's also lots of rain coming straight down the way it did in noir movies of the forties and fifties. Visually, the picture is all of a piece, but it's a self-conscious work—all dark-toned academic classicism.—*D.D.* (7/15/02) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Beekman, 42nd Street E Walk,

Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

SIGNS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

SOME LIKE IT HOT
A 1959 comedy set in the Prohibition era, with transvestism, impotence, role confusion, and borderline inversion—and all hilariously innocent, though always on the brink of really disastrous double-entendre. Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon are the musicians who witness the St. Valentine's Day Massacre and then hide out from the mobsters by disguising themselves as women and joining an all-girl band. Marilyn Monroe and Joe E. Brown are their somewhat confused love partners. Curtis demonstrates a parodistic gift with an imitation of Cary Grant (which he went on doing for years afterward), and Lemmon is demoniacally funny. Monroe gives perhaps her most characteristic performance, which means that she's both charming and embarrassing; Brown is inspired, the way he was years before in Max Reinhardt's movie of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," when he made some of us weep from laughter.—*P.K.* (Thalia Theatre; Aug. 7.)

STUART LITTLE 2
Without sacrificing any of the magical allure of the 1999 original, this sequel chronicles the further adventures of an enterprising mouse (voice by Michael J. Fox) and his adopted human family (played by Geena Davis, Hugh Laurie, and Jonathan Lipnicki). The story here is more in keeping with E. B. White's cheeky children's classic. Stuart's dilemma—being scammed by a pretty bird (Melanie Griffith) and her falcon partner (James Woods) for his family's valuables—lets the movie explore themes of loneliness and trust playfully. The director Rob Minkoff paints an idealized vision of New York City, a land of doormen and afternoon tea. His movie feels like it's spun from sugar.—*B.D.* (Battery Park 16, East 85th Street, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

SUNSHINE STATE
The writer-director John Sayles will never be a natural filmmaker, but this leisurely, ruminative movie about real-estate mischief and transiency in Florida has some of the most witty and large-spirited writing he's ever done for the movies and some of the best acting he's ever coaxed out of his performers. The movie chronicles the attempt of developers to take over a couple of decrepit beach towns north of Jacksonville and the ambiguous response of the locals—some fighting, some selling out. Edie Falco has the best role of her career as Marly, one of those Americans who possess more intelligence than they can use in an unsatisfactory job. Marly looks for men and makes bitter jokes that her listeners don't always understand. Angela Bassett is a failed actress who returns to the black middle-class beach town she left when she became pregnant at fifteen. The good talk swirls around these two, and the talkers include Alan King, Ralph Waite, Jane Alexander, Bill Cobbs, Mary Alice, Timothy Hutton, and Mary Steenburgen.—*D.D.* (7/8/02) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

TADPOLE
A short but annoying film from Gary Winick, who brings us the astonishing news that teen-age boys want to make out with women three times their age. Oscar (Aaron Stanford) is fifteen, half-French, and wholly unappealing; nevertheless, he goes to bed with a chiropractor (Bebe Neuwirth) and hungers after his own stepmother (Sigourney Weaver), who vaguely returns the compliment. Some of the scenes, involving Oscar the hapless patsy rather than Oscar the hopeful swain, are smartly managed; others, like an overcooked sequence at Café Boulud, prove harder to stomach. The movie was shot on digital video, which means that most viewers will reach for their spectacles before realizing that the fuzz is not their fault. Only Bebe Neuwirth fans, a discerning crowd, will have a ball. She has never been so mean or, as a result, so hot to the touch.—*A.L.* (7/29/02) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE
This 1937 version of the Bonnie and Clyde story, starring Sylvia Sidney and Henry Fonda (neither has ever been better), is perhaps the finest of Fritz Lang's American movies, and certainly one of the finest American melodramas of the thirties. In this version, the young outcasts are seen as innocent victims of the indifference and cruelty of society—a view the audiences of the period readily shared.—*P.K.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Aug. 12.)

ALSO PLAYING

MARTIN LAWRENCE LIVE: RUNTELDAT
84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

MERCI POUR LE CHOCOLAT
Film Forum.

METROPOLIS
Film Forum.

SEX AND LUCÍA
Sunshine Cinema.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110).
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Sept. 8: "Carnal Knowledge: The Sexual Revolution on Film, 1967-1972." Aug. 10 at 2: "Barbarella" (1967, Roger Vadim). ♦ Aug. 10 at 4:15: "Vixen!" (1968, Russ Meyer). ♦ Aug. 11 at 2: "Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice" (†). ♦ Aug. 11 at 4: "A Clockwork Orange" (1971, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ Repertory nights. Aug. 10-11 at 6:30: "Umberto D." (1952, Vittorio De Sica; in Italian).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Aug. 7 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Limey" (1999, Steven Soderbergh). ♦ The films of Ken Loach. Aug. 8 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Family Life" (1971). ♦ Aug. 9 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Hidden Agenda" (1990). ♦ Aug. 10 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Riff-Raff" (1991). ♦ Aug. 11 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Raining Stones" (1993). ♦ The American cinema of Fritz Lang. Aug. 12 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "You Only Live Once" (†). ♦ Aug. 13 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "You and Me" (1938).

BRYANT PARK
Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. (512-5700)—Free outdoor movies, starting at dusk. Aug. 12: "A Summer Place" (1959, Delmer Daves).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through Sept. 12: "Kurosawa & Mifune," a retrospective of the actor-director team. All films are new prints and in Japanese. Aug. 7-10 at 1:10, 3, 4:50, 6:40, 8:30, and 10:20: "Rashomon" (†). ♦ Aug. 11-13 at 1:20, 4, 6:40, and 9:20: "High and Low" (1963).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Through Aug. 13: "The Sly Grin: Contemporary French Comedies." Aug. 13 at 12:30 and 6:30: "The Taste of Others" (1999, Agnès Jaoui; in French). ♦ Aug. 13 at 3:30 and 9: "Three Lives and Only One Death" (1996, Raoul Ruiz; in French).

SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK
Broadway at Vernon Blvd., Long Island City (718-956-1819)—Free outdoor movies, starting at dusk. Aug. 7: "Chac, the Rain God" (1974, Rolando Klein; in Spanish).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
139-143 E. Houston St. (358-0573)—Midnight movies. Aug. 9-10: "Fight Club" (1999, David Fincher).

THALIA THEATRE
2537 Broadway, at 95th St. (864-5400)—Through Sept. 8: "Classic Thalia: A Tribute to Martin and Ursula Lewis." Aug. 7 at 7: "Some Like It Hot" (†). ♦ Aug. 7 at 9:30: "The Apartment" (1960, Billy Wilder). ♦ Aug. 8 at 7: "Mishima" (1985, Paul Schrader). ♦ Aug. 8 at 9:30: "Pickpocket" (1959, Robert Bresson; in French). ♦ Aug. 9 at 7: "Repulsion" (1965, Roman Polanski). ♦ Aug. 9 at 9: "Female Trouble" (1975, John Waters). ♦ Aug. 10 at 3 and 7:30: "Fallen Angels" (1995, Wong Kar-wai; in Cantonese). ♦ Aug. 10 at 4:45 and 9:15: "In the Mood for Love" (2000, Wong; in Cantonese). ♦ Aug. 11 at 1 and 7: "1900" (1975, Bernardo Bertolucci; in Italian). ♦ Aug. 13 at 7: "Ralph Bunche: An American Odyssey" (2000, William Greaves). ♦ Aug. 13 at 9:30: "Ali the Man: Ali the Fighter" (1975, Greaves).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Aug. 15: "Happy Birthday, Kino." Aug. 7 at 4: "The Ballad of Narayama" (1982, Shohei Imamura; in Japanese). ♦ Aug. 8 at 4:30 and 9: "Wedding in Galilee" (1987, Michel Khleifi; in Arabic, Hebrew, and Turkish). ♦ Aug. 8 at 6:45: "A Year of the Quiet Sun" (1984, Krzysztof Zanussi; in Polish). ♦ Aug. 9 at 4: "The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl" (1993, Ray Müller; in German). ♦ Aug. 9 at 7:30: "The Match Factory Girl" (1990, Aki Kaurismäki; in Finnish). ♦ Aug. 10 at 1 and Aug. 11 at 4: "M" (1931, Fritz Lang; in German). ♦ Aug. 10 at 3:30 and Aug. 11 at 1: "8½" (1963, Federico Fellini; in Italian). ♦ Aug. 10 at 6:30 and Aug. 11 at 8:30: "Kadosh" (1999, Amos Gitai; in Hebrew). ♦ Aug. 10 at 9: "Diary of a Lost Girl" (1929, G. W. Pabst). ♦ Aug. 11 at 6:30: "The Bicycle Thief" (1948, Vittorio De Sica; in Italian). ♦ Aug. 12 at 2 and 9 and Aug. 13 at 9: "The Crime of Monsieur Lange" (†). ♦ Aug. 12 at 3:45: "Diary of a Country Priest" (1954, Robert Bresson; in French). ♦ Aug. 12 at 6:15: "The Blue Kite" (1993, Tian Zhuangzhuang; in Mandarin).

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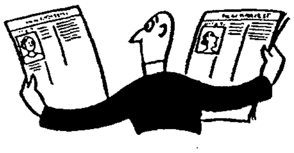
THE NEW YORKER

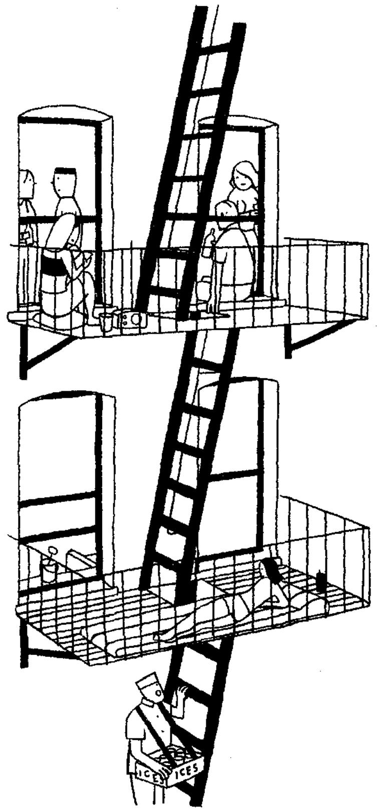
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
ON TO IRAQ?



On Monday, July 1st, in the province of Oruzgan, in south-central Afghanistan, an American AC-130 gunship unleashed its fearful firepower on the village of Kakrak and its surroundings. A big wedding party was taking place, and some of the guests were celebrating by emptying their rifles into the air. Apparently, the crew of the AC-130 mistook the shooting for hostile antiaircraft fire. Afterward, local officials said that at least fifty-four people, most of them women and children, had been killed, and that at least a hundred and twenty had been wounded. That initial account has since been independently corroborated by the *Times* and by investigators from the United Nations Assistance Mission.

Three weeks later, on Monday, July 22nd, an Israeli F-16 fighter aimed a missile tipped with a one-ton bomb at an apartment house in the Gaza Strip. The mission accomplished its goal, which was to assassinate a forty-nine-year-old Palestinian terrorist named Salah Shehada, the commander of the "military wing" of Hamas. But the Israeli missile also took the lives of at least fourteen other people—including three women and nine children, seven of whom were under the age of six—and wounded ten times that many. Afterward, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, while conceding that the civilian deaths had been "regrettable," praised the operation as "one of our major successes." But President Bush's spokesman, Ari Fleischer, deplored it as "a heavy-handed action that is not consistent with dedication to peace in the Middle East." The reproaches from other quarters—not only from the foreign ministries of Europe and the Arab world but also from within Israel's increasingly demoralized and marginalized peace camp—were considerably harsher. Writing in *Ha'aretz*, the commentator Ari Shavit called it "a grave and unforgivable act" that "plunged us deep down the slippery slope of bestiality."



LAURENT CILLUFFO

The wedding-party bombing in Oruzgan met with few such condemnations. Even so, the comparison between the two incidents is not entirely in America's favor. Israel's target (which it hit) was a specific individual—a remorseless killer, who had already organized suicide attacks that deliberately slaughtered scores, perhaps hundreds, of innocent Israeli civilians and who was in the process of organizing more of the same. America's target (which it missed) was the remnants of a ragtag army that had been routed months before. Israel's operation was based on intelligence that was half solid (Shehada was in the building the missile hit); it was ruined by the mistake, still unexplained, of using a bomb that, though accurate to within a metre, was so big it destroyed neighboring buildings full of families. In Oruzgan, the decision to open fire, and to keep firing, seems to have been based on little more than the sight of tracer bullets in the dark and the knowledge that the area is one where sympathy for the Taliban strongly lingers. In Gaza, Israel was callous and careless with innocent human life; but, in Oruzgan, America was no less so. And the greater callousness of a terrorist enemy excuses neither.

In the *Times* a couple of Sundays ago,

the war correspondent Dexter Filkins put Oruzgan's terrible night in a larger context. He wrote, "The American air campaign in Afghanistan, based on a high-tech, out-of-harm's-way strategy, has produced a pattern of mistakes that have killed hundreds of Afghan civilians." It's a strategy that emerged back in December at Tora Bora, where, as Senator John Kerry pointed out last week, the Administration's reluctance to put troops at risk allowed a thousand members of Al Qaeda to disperse and escape. The same reluctance seems to be contributing to an ominous erosion of the paste-and-piano-wire polity that has been formed in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, in the Middle East, the descent into numbing horror continues: last week, Hamas took its revenge for Gaza with a bloody, sickeningly nihilistic attack on the Hebrew University. The Bush Administration still seems unwilling to exert itself to deflect the two sides from their headlong rush toward the abyss. And, amidst all this, with so much left undone, the Administration, as if with relief, turns increasingly toward talk of, and preparation for, war with Iraq.

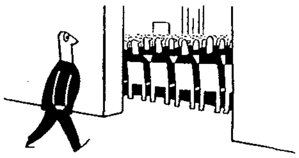
No wonder, then, that for the first time since September 11th Washington is full of calls for "debate." With the opening of hearings last week under the auspices of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a debate seems, belatedly, to have begun. But it's a debate in which the sides are weirdly asymmetrical. The pro-war side has the heroic profile, the moral certainty, the geopolitical washboard abs buffed by years in the ideological weight rooms of conservative think tanks. It has the jut-jawed glamour imparted by the advocacy of bold action whose costs are all in the future. And it has the bully pulpits—not just the Presidential podium, which for this President is more shield than sword, more muffler than megaphone, but also the Pentagon briefing room, where Donald Rumsfeld, the Administration's foxy grandpa and its most self-confident voice, struts his stuff. The other side—which, at least in official Washington, is not so much anti-war as maybe-war—has the disadvantages that accrue to the genuinely undecided, the sincerely perplexed. Its diffidence is not, or not simply, a product of the fear of being painted as pusillanimous or unpatriotic. The maybe-warriors don't dispute the desirability of "regime change" in Baghdad; but they wonder about the costs, the aftermath, and the question of priorities.

The Bush Administration has produced plenty of plans for war in Iraq—a different one is leaked to a different newspaper nearly every week—but it has not yet produced a rationale. The savagery of Saddam Hussein's regime is not in dispute. But is the danger it presents to its neighbors and to the United States so immediate, and of such a magnitude and nature, that war is the only responsible choice? How much suffering and death would have to be inflicted, and accepted, in order to achieve the goal of removing the dictator? What would be the effect upon the national and global economy? Does it make sense to make war on an Arab country at a moment when anti-American hatred in the Arab states is stirred by the Israeli-Palestinian nightmare? What does it mean to speak of bringing democracy to Iraq when our most important Arab allies are a monarchy (Jordan), a ramshackle authoritarian dictatorship (Egypt), and a tribal kleptocracy in frightened thrall to fundamentalist clerics (Saudi Arabia)? What will happen to the Kurds of Iraq, abandoned after the Gulf War but now enjoying a fragile yet prosperous autonomy? To the people, to Congress, and to American democracy itself, the Administration owes a full and guileless accounting. In Washington, one side wants war; the other wants debate about war. One calls for victory; the other temporizes. And, for the moment, the temporizers are right.

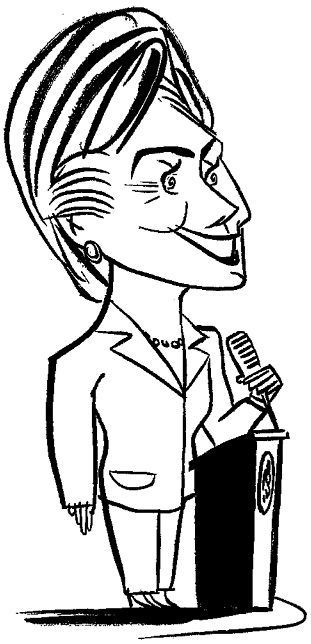
—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

GET 'EM NEXT TIME DEPT.

A CONFEDERACY OF DEMOCRATS



The Democratic Leadership Council, which bivouacked at a midtown hotel for a "national conversation" last week, trailing a string of Presidential hopefuls and heavy elements of the political press corps, is perhaps the nerdiest of all political factions. It is brainy ("an idea factory," according to Congressman Richard Gephardt) and yet it also tends to be socially clumsy. Its national meetings, which seem to occur every third week, are usually marked by a contretemps, inevitably over something symbolic and sophomoric, often involving the roster of speakers invited—moderate Democrats, like many former social outcasts, have an unhealthy obsession with who should be in and who should be out. A decade ago, Jesse Jackson was invited one year, disinvited the next. This year, Al Gore—a charter member of the Democratic Leadership Council—seemed to disinvite himself. (He was in New York "on business," but somehow couldn't find time to pop over and give a speech.) The Gore deficit was accompanied by a decision by his former running mate, Senator Joseph Lieberman, of Connecticut, to admit that he wasn't very comfortable with Gore's populist "people versus the powerful" ranting during the 2000 campaign. Given the recent depredations among the powerful, the timing of Lieberman's confession was odd. Indeed, this was a subtext of the meeting: How would the pro-business D.L.C. deal with the renewed Old Democratic theme of anti-corporate populism?



Hillary Rodham Clinton

TOM BACHTELL

The answer was embedded in the ancient D.L.C. mantra, first intoned by Bill Clinton, in Cleveland, in 1991: "Opportunity, Responsibility, Community." Responsibility was very big this year. Community, suddenly, was not: it has been purged from the official slogan, replaced by Security, which has the advantage of alluding to both national defense and financial security. In the event, the A-list orators spent more time wandering the highways and byways of Responsibility than they spent on Opportunity and Security combined. Corporate responsibility was the main theme, of course, and fiscal responsibility was prominent, too: the Clinton budget surpluses were contrasted with the Bush budget deficits.

The speeches weren't very memorable, but two were notable. The most courageous was delivered by Senator John Kerry, of Massachusetts. It was a broad attack on the Bush Administration's foreign policy, including a detailed military criticism of the Afghanistan campaign: "When given the opportunity to destroy Al Qaeda at Tora Bora, the President turned not to the best military in the history of man—this President turned to Afghan warlords who only a week before were on the other side. . . . We didn't close off the back-side mountain exit, we didn't maintain the initiative, and we allowed Al Qaeda to disperse." Kerry stumbled through parts of the speech, which wasn't particularly well written, but his argument was forceful and had the political virtue of criticizing the President from both the right (for the tactical failure in Afghanistan) and the left (for refusing to develop renewable fuels, which "can never be embargoed, can never be taken hostage, and not one American son or daughter will ever lose their life defending them").

The other notable speech was delivered by Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, who received the most enthusiastic reaction from the audience, which was composed primarily of local elected officials from around the country. This was something of a surprise: Mrs. Clinton has always had a tetchy relationship with the D.L.C., which considered her Bill Clinton's most powerful Old Democratic adviser. But, sounding a lot less lugubrious than previous speakers, she served as the meeting's unofficial host, New York's Junior Senator, a title that had great resonance with members of the audience, many of whom were visiting the city for the first time since September 11th. And she had the additional advantage of being introduced in rousing fashion by Harold Schaitberger, the president of the International Association of Firefighters, who described her low-key and determined efforts to help the families of those who were lost that day.

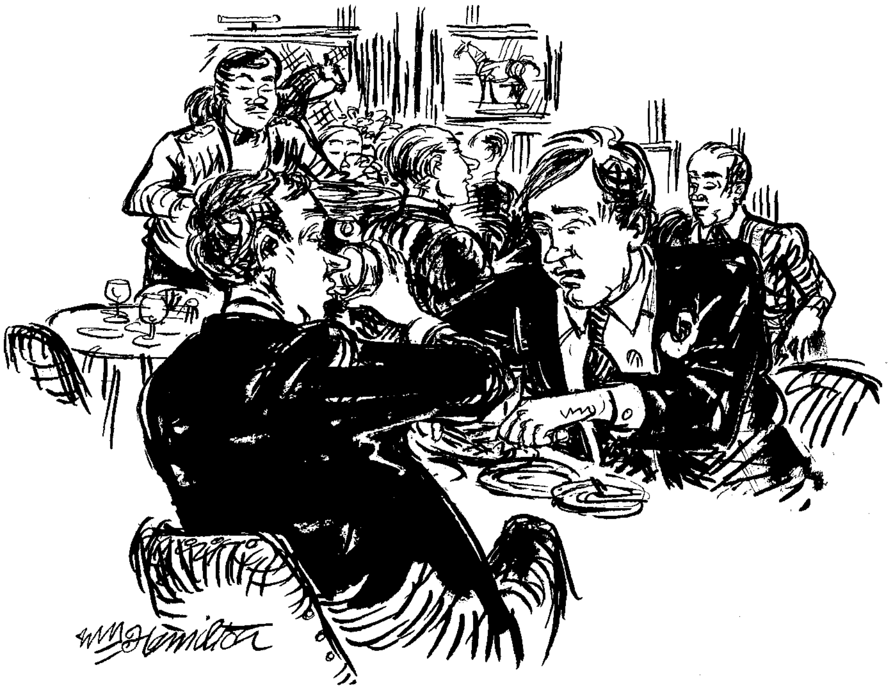
Senator Clinton made many of the same economic points as the other speakers—although in a lighter, folksier manner, citing the old aphorism "You can't roll up your sleeves if you're pointing your fingers at somebody else"—but her most effective moments came when she discussed homeland security. She talked about going late one night to Walter Reed hospital to visit soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division who had been wounded in Afghanistan, and asking them if they'd had all the equipment and support they needed for combat. Yes, they told her, they had everything they needed. "But," she went on, "when I go to the police stations and fire stations and ask them, 'Do you have what you need?' they honestly tell me they don't. We've got to do more to make sure that federal dollars get into the hands of our firefighters, our police officers, and our emergency responders."

The opportunity to cheer cops and firefighters in New York wasn't wasted on the audience. But political deftness and ease of delivery were not the most impressive things about the Senator's turn: Clinton was the only speaker who didn't make an advance text available to the press. Apparently, she winged it. A day later, in response to a call to the Senator's office requesting a copy of the speech, a press aide said, "Sorry, but it's still being transcribed."

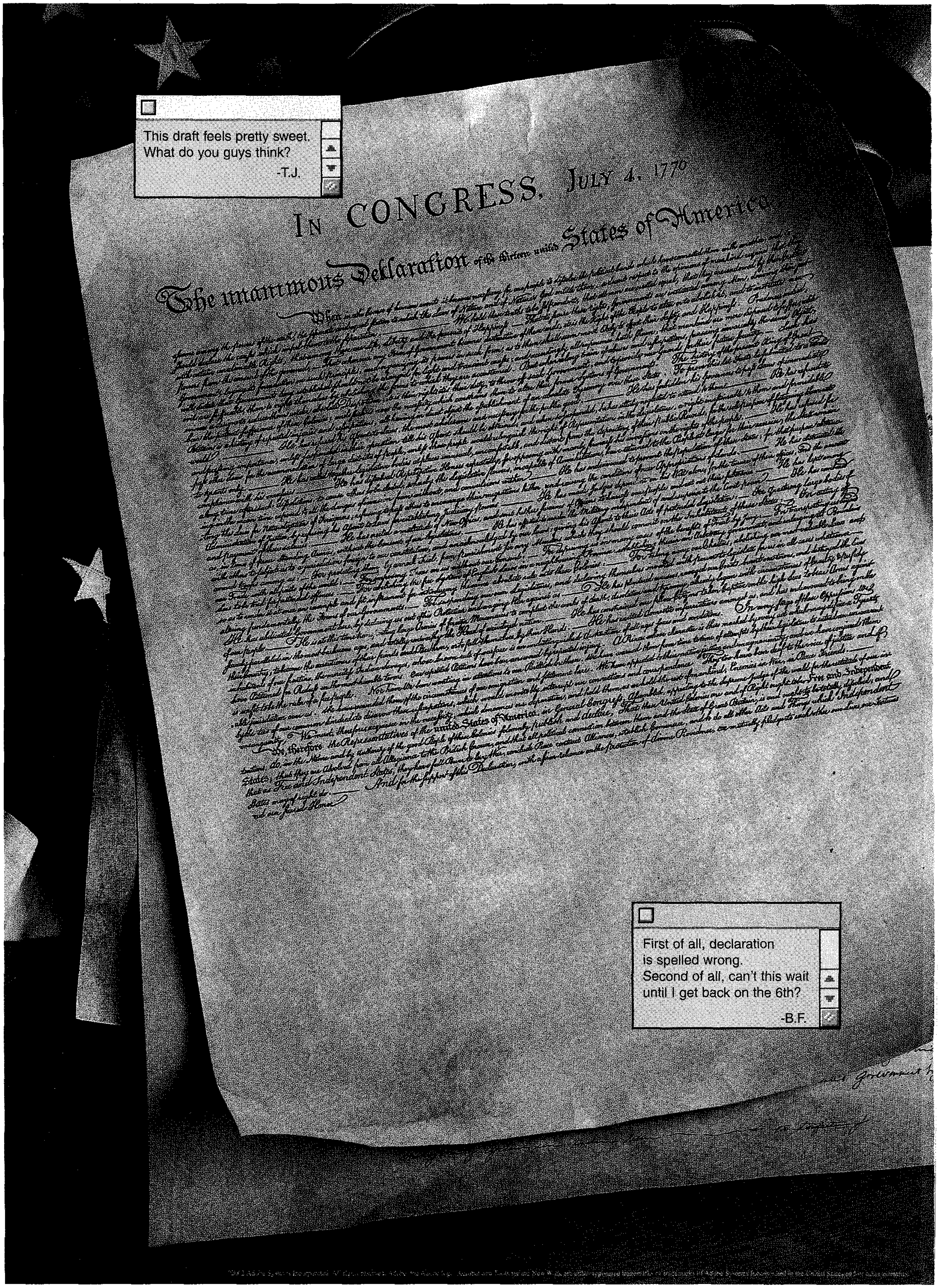
—*Joe Klein*

SALISBURY POSTCARD
THINK OF ENGLAND

Every country has an ideal picture of itself; but not every country gets the chance to vote for it. After a shortlist proposed by readers of *Country Life*, and a final decision by a parish council of media worthies, Britain's Best View has just been announced. It is a prospect of Salisbury Cathedral from the water meadows. In the foreground, ten plump cows, knee-deep in pasture, graze contentedly; the cathedral roof peeks over a wash of luxuriant trees; the spire bi-



"She had a lot to offer—but she never offered it."


IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776
The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America

This draft feels pretty sweet.
What do you guys think?
-T.J.

First of all, declaration
is spelled wrong.
Second of all, can't this wait
until I get back on the 6th?
-B.F.

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sects a sky of perfect early-summer blue, with a few plausible yet unthreatening clouds.

The runners-up were similarly pastoral: Buttermere, in the Lake District; Chesil Bank, in Dorset; Three Cliffs Bay, on the Gower Peninsula; Derwent Water, again in the Lake District. No patriotic Polaroids of Windsor Castle, no creamy Georgian terraces, and, of course, no filthy modern architecture. Though the British (which here mainly means the English) live a predominantly urban or suburban existence, they still think of themselves, spiritually, as rural, even while their Government is proposing new motorways and a new London airstrip and has just announced one of the biggest house-building programs in southern England in decades.

Salisbury Cathedral is not an eccentric choice: the itinerant Bill Bryson judged it the single most beautiful structure in England. Still, the image invites a certain annotation. First, there are no people in the shot. Do the British, when they think of their country, prefer it without the inhabitants? In this they might not be alone: a recent survey of foreign responses to tourists from various countries ranked the British dead last, thanks to their general deportment and aversion to tipping. Second, the cattle may have that careless, free-range look, as if tended by some off-camera yokel fluting away on a tin whistle; but their meat—thanks to the memory of B.S.E.—is unsalable in France. Modern agricultural practices are widely viewed as nutritional necromancy: can we be sure there isn't a nearby genetically modified crop about to cross-pollinate that pure pasture?

Third, the cathedral, so tall and so solid, appears to symbolize the durability of an established church. Yet the faithful of the Church of England currently bend the knee in considerably fewer numbers than either British Catholics or British Muslims. Long gone are the days when the Church was at the center of British power—or, more accurately, the center right ("the Tory Party at prayer," it was once called). Even the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, openly supports its disestablishment: "The notion of the monarch as supreme governor has outlived its usefulness," he says plainly.

So a cartoonist could easily doodle some satirical reality over this Best View: add some mosquey bits to the cathedral spire, drive a couple of the cows mad, perhaps insert a few upturned grocery carts and an illegal Afghan refugee fleeing immigration officials. But then "best" doesn't necessarily imply "most real"; or, for that matter, "most original." If Britain's Best View stirs an atavistic memory, it is precisely because the photograph was taken near the spot at which Constable painted his famous version of the cathedral some two centuries ago. As the mail-order companies know, there's nothing more comforting to the soul than classy repro.

—*Julian Barnes*

FISH STORY

TEETH

On a recent Sunday afternoon, John Dumke and Kristina Harvey's two young sons were digging in the sand on Gibson Beach, in Bridgehampton, when Harvey noticed something odd. An unusual number of gulls and terns were diving at the water, at a large, shifting, circular mass of grey shadow, which, she soon realized, was bearing down quickly on a group of swimmers frolicking in the surf. She watched it come. This thing was big—a hundred and fifty feet in diameter, by Dumke's estimate. Now others saw it, too, and soon parents were rushing to the water's edge, waving their arms, and yelling, "Get out of the water! Get out of the water!" The bathers looked around them, then dashed onto the beach. As they regrouped at the tide line and gazed out at the waves, they saw what they'd run from: a school of bluefish, a feeding frenzy.

Off eastern Long Island, August is high season for bluefish feeding frenzies. Paul Rickenbach, the mayor of East Hampton, said that, while schools of feeding blues are best avoided, their presence should not deter tourists from visiting the area's beaches. "You're going into a natural element, and that's the Atlantic Ocean, so you're going to encounter fish and marine life of all kinds," Rickenbach said. But Captain Ken Rafferty, who runs a charter service out of Three Mile Harbor, in East Hampton, has seen firsthand what bluefish can do. Years ago, an eighteen-pounder bit through his right middle finger, leaving it permanently bent. (This has earned him the nickname Captain Hook.) Rafferty says that bluefish, when they are in a frenzy, are "insane" and will try to eat anything. He once demonstrated this by tying a flip-flop to a fifty-pound test line, and dragging it across the surface over a school of feeding blues, which chewed it to pieces.

On Gibson Beach, while the bathers watched the roiling mass make its way along the shoreline, Kristina Harvey focussed on a teen-age boy who was still in the water, taking a surfing lesson. Neither he nor his instructor could see what was headed toward them. Harvey began running down the beach, waving her arms and yelling. The surfer and his instructor gave her the thumbs-up, as the fish on the perimeter of the frenzy closed in.

Harvey happened to glance back at the dunes, where she saw, striding down a wooden staircase, a familiar and reassuring figure: Roy Scheider.

"In my mind, he had on that khaki police uniform from 'Jaws,' and that worried but in-command expression, and he was yelling at everyone to get out of the water," Harvey said.

Scheider was, in fact, wearing tight dark swimming trunks, and he looked very brown and ropy. He wasn't yelling anything, either. If he was concerned, he didn't show it. These were, after all, just bluefish. He stood calmly as the teen-ager and the instructor caught a wave and surfed obliviously to safety.

"I've seen plenty of bluefish feeding frenzies in the years I've lived on this beach," Scheider said a little later. "I didn't know that they could attack swimmers, though. I've got a lot of friends who call to ask if the blues are running, but I don't fish them myself. They're so crazed that all you have to do is stick a hook in the water and pull them out—where's the sport in that?"

Scheider said that he sometimes takes his kids out to fish for striped bass.

"I don't do it that often, though," he said. "I don't really like boats."

—*Adam Green*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
SHORT AND DISTORT

For J. P. Morgan Chase, the trouble started on Monday, July 22nd, when a Senate subcommittee raised questions about the role that the bank, along with other institutions, played in helping Enron set up a "maze of financial transactions that . . . makes Rube Goldberg look like a slacker." Investors, keenly aware of what helping Enron had done for Arthur Andersen, began dumping J. P. Morgan stock. Things got worse the next day, when rumors—of criminal prosecution, huge fines, a bad bet on gold—started to circulate in the market. The stickiest of them maintained that the bank had suffered giant losses in its derivatives business and that the Federal Reserve had held an emergency meeting to address the potential fallout. Never mind that these vague scenarios lacked sense (and, as it turned out, substance). They rippled across trading floors and surfaced on the Web, giving rise to the broader rumor that J. P. Morgan Chase was facing a liquidity crunch—that it might not have enough money on hand to meet its obligations. This is not a good thing for a bank. By Wednesday morning, the company's stock had fallen to its lowest price in six years. The rumor mill was grinding J. P. Morgan Chase into very fine pieces.

Rumors, of course, have been grist for the Wall Street mill since the first shares were traded beneath the buttonwood tree, but they have been especially nettlesome since the Enron story broke. Gordon Allport, in his classic work "The Psychology of Rumor," noted that they tend to flourish when there's a dearth of news and also when there's a glut—when the truth is most elusive. That about describes the market these days: there's a ton of news, but we all suspect that there's something—probably something very bad—that we don't know yet.

The most insidious Wall Street rumor is one that is deliberately planted in order to move a stock. Starting such a rumor is technically illegal, but people on the Street engage in this low-grade information warfare all the time, especially when investors are skittish. "In this market, the path of least resistance is downward," an analyst at a major mutual fund said last week. "So it's not that difficult for some yobbo at a hedge fund to sell a stock short, tell someone on a trading desk that he's heard that the company's about to blow up, and then sit back and watch the news work its way through the market."

Once a stock starts moving, more rumors spring up to explain why. One day two weeks ago, the conglomerate Tyco saw its stock—which had been shaky for days—begin plummeting at the opening bell. "I called around to our salespeople trying to find out what was happening," the analyst said. "Some of them were hearing that Tyco was going to declare bankruptcy. Now, this was an absurd rumor, but calling around about it helps keep the rumor going, because the guy sitting next to the salesperson hears something about bankruptcy, and the guy I'm talking to at a different firm gets the news. It's viral. There may be nothing really happening, but if you ask enough people someone will come up with a good story."

ERIC PALMA

Even far-fetched rumors get a hearing these days, because much that was unimaginable a couple of years ago is now, after Enron and WorldCom, all too credible. "If you look at Tyco's numbers, the only way it could be on the verge of bankruptcy is if it was completely lying to us," the analyst said. "But there are lots of people out there who find the idea that a company is completely lying perfectly plausible." That's especially true of a company like Tyco, whose former C.E.O. was indicted two months ago for tax evasion. On a conference call that was hastily arranged to combat the rumors, Tyco's C.F.O. admitted as much: "We realize that, given our events over the past six months, we have given fodder to Tyco stories in a very nervous market."

Still, even a plausible rumor needs help. If the people who hear it first respond by buying or selling stocks, the rumor takes root. If they don't, it won't. On Wall Street, information is conveyed through price. Whether a story is true or not is almost beside the point; if it can move a stock, it's true enough—at least, until something comes along to contradict it. With the Tyco bankruptcy rumor, that happened when the company announced, after the market had closed, that it had appointed a new C.E.O.; the next day the stock jumped forty-six per cent. Investors who'd sold on the rumor missed out. And J. P. Morgan bounced back, too, after it explicitly denied the rumors about its problems. (The firm also says that its dealings with Enron were legal.)

What we're seeing today is the mirror image of the hysteria that gripped the market three years ago, when stocks were routinely propelled upward on the flimsiest of positive rumors. Then the key strategy was "pump and dump." Now it's "short and distort." The result is that the market's reaction to a hint of bad news is quicker and more dramatic than its reaction to good news, a pattern that fits what social scientists have found: people generally assign more importance to negative information than to positive information.

"Rumors are noise," Michael Mayo, a banking analyst at Prudential Securities, says. These days, however, noise matters. The rise of momentum investing—buying stocks as they rise, selling them as they fall—and of minute-by-minute market coverage in the media has made rumors more contagious and more potent, exacerbating investors' tendency to herd. As a result, stock prices are swinging more wildly than ever before. In 1913, during the heyday of stock pools and insider trading, the market observer Harrison Brace wrote, "Calculations and statistics of great pith and moment are disregarded in the scramble for tips, rumors, and surface indications." Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

—*James Surowiecki*

THE POLITICAL SCENE

THE NEW TEXAN

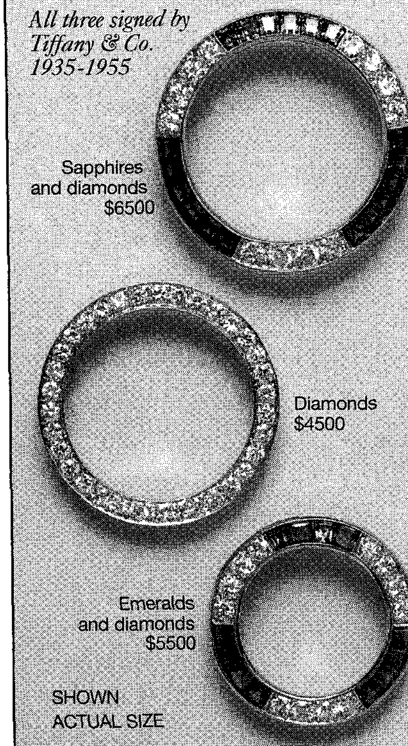
Why George Bush is scared of Ron Kirk.

BY PETER J. BOYER

In the autumn of 1960, the people of Texas were given the chance—legitimately—to vote twice in the same election for Lyndon Johnson, who appeared on the ballot both as John F. Kennedy's running mate and, for insurance, as a candidate for reëlection to the United States Senate. When the Kennedy-Johnson team won the White House, Johnson resigned the Senate seat, which he had easily retaken. In a special election, Texans elected a Republican—John Tower—to the Senate for the first time since Reconstruction. It marked an epic turn in Texas politics, one that was accelerated, as Johnson predicted it would be, by the civil-rights programs that Johnson subsequently championed as President. In Texas, and across the South, national Democratic policies cost local Democrats their power. Twenty-three years later, Tower was followed in the Senate by Phil Gramm, a former Democrat who had switched parties, and in 1994 Gramm was joined by another Republican, Kay Bailey Hutchison. Republican dominion in Texas is now nearly complete, with Republicans holding every statewide office, from land commissioner to governor.

And so it is that the Texas Republican occupying the White House might assume that Texans, by whom he is adored, would not behave so uncharacteristically as to elect a Democrat to L.B.J.'s old Senate seat, which became open when Gramm announced that he would retire this year. Such a development would complicate President Bush's life considerably, probably cementing the Democrats' tenuous hold on the Senate, which was brought about by the defection, last year, of Jim Jeffords, of Vermont, from the Republican Party. Faced with that prospect, Texas Republicans put forward the state's Attorney General, John Cornyn, whom, by any detached reckoning, the odds overwhelmingly favor. Cornyn is a typecast candidate, with the bearing and silver-haired looks of a United States senator. More important, he is a friend of the President, and a protégé of Karl Rove, the mastermind of Bush's own political rise in Texas (and beyond). Rove's associates are working on the campaign, and Bush has already raised more than a million dollars for Cornyn, and will likely return to Texas to do more.

Yet Texas Democrats, even with the weight of money, history, and George W. Bush against them, are looking forward to the Senate election with an almost giddy optimism, centering on a bald, bespectacled black man named Ron Kirk. Kirk was the mayor of Dallas until he stepped down at the end of 2001 to campaign full-time for the Senate. He brings to the race the one intangible that can trump the advantages of money, connections, even issues—he has a captivating charm. He gives a passable speech, but in and among a crowd he has a way of drawing people to him. The six-foot-two-inch Kirk, a man of boundless amiability, so clearly delights in all the recognition, the hand-grasping, the jokey small talk—the everyday business of politicking—that strangers find themselves being swept up with him. Before a recent no-frills flight from Dallas's Love Field, Kirk showily declined an airline official's offer to pre-board ("No, no, no! Are you kidding me? I'd have ninety-five people voting against me!"), then chatted up the passengers as they filed by, and again as he made his way to his seat, in the rear ("Hey! Could use your help now!"). At the event on the other end of the flight, a political barbecue in Corpus Christi, as mariachis snaked through the convention center and the smell of hot pork and chicken wafted to the rafters, Kirk moved animatedly from group to group, deftly attaching names to dimly remembered faces, patting the men on the back, hugging the wives. He signed autographs, and huddled with a group of Boy Scouts for a private confab that ended with all of them—



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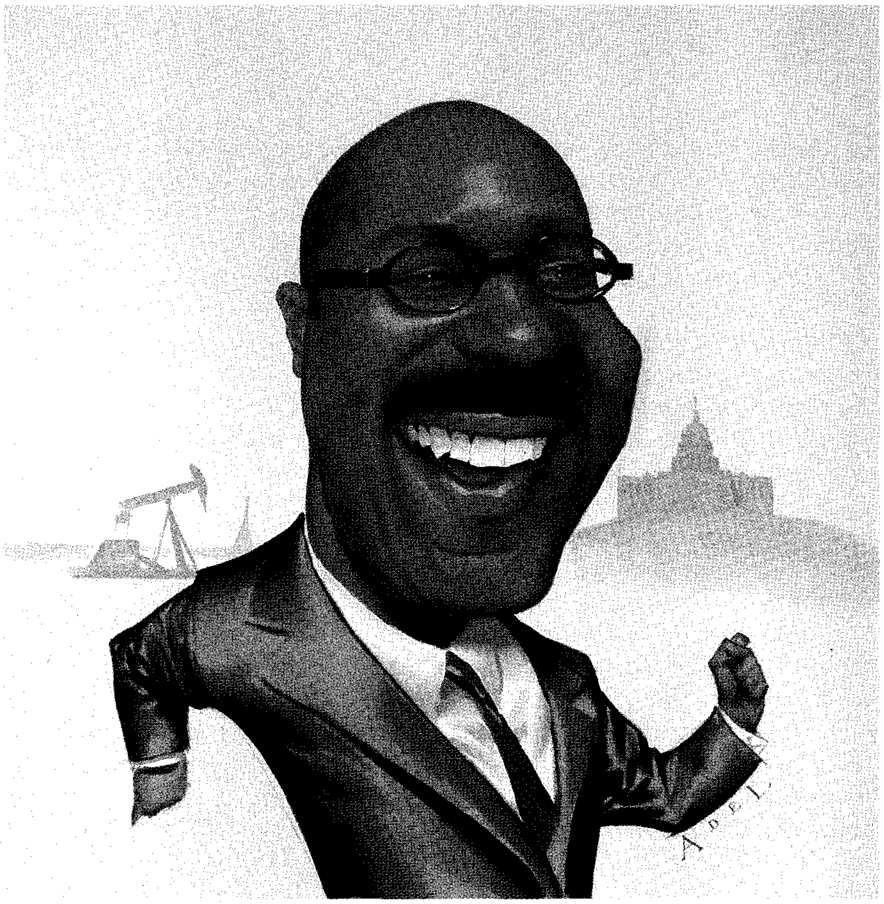
Kirk, too—bursting into raucous laughter.

Having been a black, big-city mayor is not an obviously useful credential among a conservative general electorate, but, in the cultural code of Texas, Dallas is no ordinary big city. In Corpus Christi, David Perry, a prominent trial lawyer, introduced Kirk to the crowd by saying, "Ron Kirk is from Dallas, Texas. And I know and you know that there is no place in the world that is more backward and reactionary than Dallas, Texas, and yet Ron Kirk was elected by a majority vote."



Dallas's business élite admired Mayor Kirk's powerful instinct for building consensus.

DANIEL ADEL

In fact, Kirk was elected twice, by overwhelming margins, in 1995 and 1999, at a time when conservative Dallas was also voting for George Bush, and for much the same reason: pro-business policies and a personal affability that complemented a powerful instinct for building consensus.

Kirk could not have won the mayoralty or governed in Dallas without the support of white Republicans, some of whom are among his most enthusiastic backers in his run for the Senate. He spent much of his forty-eighth birthday, in late June, in the moneyed white neighborhoods of North Dallas, Turtle Creek, and Preston Hollow, mingling with well-wishers in catered Martha Stewart tableaux in which even the lawns—thick, bouncy swards of green velvet—seemed Republican. Kirk, his jacket and tie removed, his bald pate glistening in the afternoon heat, mixes easily in this set, which includes more than a few social acquaintances of his and his wife's. (Matrice Ellis-Kirk is a headhunter for the international executive-search firm Heidrick & Struggles.) His hostess at one of the receptions was Lucy Billingsley. Her father, the developer Trammell Crow, is an old friend of Ronald Reagan and of the Bushes, and a reliable Republican contributor. (Crow has contributed to Cornyn's campaign and to Kirk's.) Billingsley, a businesswoman, is also a Republican, but she is backing Kirk, because of his mastery of the city's disputatious government. When Kirk came into office, in 1995, Dallas was riven by, among other forces, shrill racial politics. "It was embarrassing," Billingsley told me, sitting on an upholstered Nepalese stool in her sun room, as Kirk greeted the guests on her lawn. "Instantly upon Ron Kirk's becoming mayor, the tone changed. I don't know what he did to accomplish it, but he got a strong, positive teamwork and respect established on our city council."

Kirk, along with the Tennessee congressman Harold Ford, Jr., represents a new generation of black politicians. Their methods were not formed by the civil-rights movement, their political base is not the church, and they are not inclined to practice identity politics. They are products of the educated middle class, with backgrounds in business or in law. "It's easier for the media to gravitate to Jesse Jackson or Al Sharpton or other figures who play more to the national stage," Kirk says. "The Democratic Party is going through a maturing process now. Whether you want to call us New Democrats, or whatever, you've got people like me and others saying, 'We're absolutely committed to progress and maintaining our hold on issues of equality. But you know what? We ought to be cutting taxes, we should be making sure the government operates with more efficiency.'"

There are early signs that Kirk's appeal isn't merely local. Records filed with the Federal Election Commission last month showed that he raised more money in the last quarter than Cornyn—much of it from Democrats outside the state who see Kirk as an asset to the national Party, and a chance to embarrass Bush in his own state. In Texas, Kirk's name recognition is higher than Cornyn's, even though Cornyn, who was a justice on the state Supreme Court before he became Attorney General, has held statewide office for almost ten years. In one poll, Kirk is leading Cornyn by eight points.

Yet Kirk knows that the numbers could change at any moment, and have yet to be put to the test. A campaign staffer told me that recently, when he asked Kirk to summarize the Senate race, Kirk answered without hesitation, "What it comes down to is whether white people are going to vote for a black man."

Kirk was born in Austin in 1954, the year of the Brown v. Board of Education decision, and he remembers matinées at the segregated Paramount Theatre, where he naïvely thought it was a great thing that blacks had their own refreshment stand upstairs. But his childhood in Austin, a progressive town, unfolded in the twilight of segregation, and Ron was in the vanguard of what came next. Ambition and achievement were the fundamentals of his childhood home; the rights struggle was an overlay.

MY OLD BODY

My old body:
a ladder of sunlight,
mercury dust floating through—

My forgivenesses,
how you have learned to love me in my sleep.

—*Jean Valentine*

He was the youngest of four children, and his parents were both educated at a black college in Austin. Kirk's father, Lee, experienced deep disappointment in his life, which he had once hoped to spend practicing medicine. In 1943, after joining the military, he married his college sweetheart, Willie Mae Jones, before being sent to France. When he returned home, he and Willie Mae had a daughter, and, with a family to provide for, he gave up the idea of medical school. Instead, he got a job at the Austin post office, becoming the city's first black postal clerk—a relatively prestigious posting. He quietly bore harassment and the denial of promotions that he had rightly earned, and he began to drink. "He internalized it," Kirk says. Once, when Ron was a young man, he was called to the post office by Lee Kirk's colleagues, who wheeled Ron's inebriated father to the car in a canvas mail cart. He kept his job, and continued to provide for his family. Lee Kirk died at fifty-nine.

Willie Mae Kirk was a driven woman. She had been reared by older siblings, and then talked her way into a college scholarship. She became a schoolteacher, and was ambitious for her children, especially her youngest, Ron, whom she still calls "my baby." Willie Mae had rules. You didn't walk down the street chewing gum, or with a can of soda in your hand. You attended Sunday school and church every week, then came home to dinner, which was served on the good china. Proper English was insisted upon. ("No sir, no ghetto talk around me," she says. "I don't want that.") Willie Mae's home was the sort where friends of her teen-age children would stop and tuck in their shirttails before knocking on the door.

When I visited Willie Mae Kirk at her home, a tidy white-trimmed brick house in a working-class neighborhood in East Austin, her dining-room table was covered with mementos from Ron's childhood. Many of them were newspaper clippings of achievements in activities that his mother had urged upon him—cellist in the orchestra, state president of the Teenage March of Dimes, officer of the service organization Jack and Jill. By the time Ron was finishing sixth grade, Austin was beginning to integrate its schools, and he was one of the first blacks to be enrolled in a mixed junior high school. He remembers racial flareups, mostly scuffles over romantic encounters that breached ethnic lines, occurring almost every week. He moved on to integrated Reagan High (named after a nineteenth-century Texas senator), and he thrived there, winning election as president of the student council. But his life back in his neighborhood was more problematic.

"I was sort of trapped in this middle person's world, where I got as much guff from black friends who said, 'You talk white,' and was ridiculed as much for being a good student, or being on the student council, as I was cursed at by whites for being a black kid," he recalls. "The kids who went to the all-black school always wanted to beat us up, because we supposedly thought we were better than them and went to school with the white folks. . . . You talk about 'nigger,' but, I'll tell you, it hurt just as much to be called Uncle Tom. Early on, I learned that friendship is important enough that you'd better take it how it comes. Not everybody that's white hates you, not everybody that's black loves you. You take 'em like you find 'em."

By Ron's senior year, Austin had closed the nearby black school, and the administration at Reagan called upon him to help smooth the transition for the incoming black students. When there was a riot at school that year, Kirk helped to mediate. People began to tell him that he had the makings of a politician, but Kirk worried that it was another way of telling him he wasn't very smart. He wanted to be a lawyer, like Thurgood Marshall. After graduating, he went to Austin College, a well-regarded Presbyterian liberal-arts school in northeast Texas. But, in the middle of his sophomore year in college, Kirk experienced an identity crisis. "I'm in these two worlds," he recalls. "I'm in cello lessons, and then I'm reading 'Soul on Ice' and 'The Autobiography of Malcolm X.' I get away and I'm on my own in college, and I'm still trying to decide who I am. Am I this product of integration, or am I this kid who grew up in East Austin?" He decided to leave school, in order to discover his blackness. His mother wept. Then she picked up the telephone and called Sarah Weddington, a state legislator in whose campaign she had worked. Weddington (who had argued Roe v. Wade before the Supreme Court) arranged an internship for Ron, working for the president of the constitutional convention at the state capitol. He saw the workings of the Texas legislature at close hand, observing such formidable black politicians as the voluble Mickey Leland and the prim Eddie Bernice Johnson, and hearing the quickening oratory of black firebrands who took to the floor in dashikis. He also got to know Weddington's office assistant—Ann Richards, the future governor. He returned to school, and after graduating went on to get his law degree from the University of Texas, but the seeds

of a life in politics had been planted.

Kirk says that he tried to resist the pull of politics, allowing himself to be lured instead by the prospect of a prosperous life as a big-time lawyer. He imagined large jury awards and settlement fees, and, after law school, he joined a firm in Dallas. The actual practice of law, though, seemed only to heighten his attraction to politics, and in 1981, after less than two years, he accepted a job as legislative assistant to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, in Washington. Bentsen had come to the Senate, in 1970, after a primary victory against Ralph Yarborough, the liberal lion of the progressive wing of the Texas Democratic Party. When Kirk told his parents that he was going to work for the man who had beaten Yarborough, they did not take it well. "There was this long silence over the phone," he recollects. "I might as well have said I was going to go work for Barry Goldwater." But Kirk says he learned much from Bentsen, who helped to unify the fractured Democratic Party in Texas, and became an influential presence in Washington, by securing the middle ground. "I was going to Washington to fight the Republican regime, and was immediately struck by the fact that Lloyd Bentsen made sure everybody understood that we have a job to do. Our job is to take care of the people of Texas. Politics is what we do when we get elected.... That began my evolution to what I call practical politics, away from partisanship and from the worry about whether you define me as a conservative or a liberal."

Two years later, back in Texas on a holiday, Kirk heard from a friend that the Dallas city attorney's office had an opening for an assistant attorney, whose chief duty was lobbying for the city in Austin. Kirk interviewed for the job in a borrowed suit, and he was hired. He was good at lobbying, and it sharpened his instinct for finding the common ground. "You only have so much political capital you can spend," he says.

In 1987, at a charity ball, he met Matrice Ellis, and, he says, "I was struck. I took one look at her and said, 'That's who I'm going to marry.' I didn't know her, didn't know anything about her. We argued all night long. But I was impressed." Matrice's background was distinctly different from Kirk's. She came from a broken home in Cleveland, was raised by her grandmother and great-grandmother, and ran away from home to attend a school in Massachusetts that gave scholarships to gifted inner-city kids. She excelled in math there, and eventually was accepted by the University of Pennsylvania, where she earned a degree in economics. She went to Dallas because she'd heard it was a city that valued initiative over family or connections, and she was just settling in when she met Ron. They married that same year, and now have two daughters.

Kirk loved lobbying, but the pay was government level (he jokes that his wife has expensive tastes), and in 1989 he went into private practice with a big downtown law firm, Johnson & Gibbs. Still, politics beckoned, and in 1994 his old friend Ann Richards, who was now governor, appointed him Secretary of State. That job ended in 1995, when George Bush defeated Richards, and Kirk went back to private practice, at yet another big downtown firm, Gardere Wynne Sewell. But by then he had settled his ambivalence about politics. He ran for mayor, and, by his account, never doubted the outcome.

"Matrice went to Wharton," he says, "and she can walk in and look at a set of numbers and instantly get it, intuitively. Politically, I can just see it. I just can. In my mind's eye, I can see how it comes together. The day that I announced to run for mayor, I believed in my heart I was going to be the next mayor of Dallas. I knew I was going to win. So my whole campaign was constructed not so much to convince people that they should vote for me but to convince people of what I was going to do when I won, and reinforce the message 'He's going to be O.K.'"

Kirk's rise in Dallas was abetted, to a considerable measure, by Carol Reed, a blond, husky-voiced veteran of Republican politics in Texas. Reed had been a political director for John Tower and then Phil Gramm, and the walls of her uptown office are a visual résumé, filled with photographs of Ronald Reagan, Bob Dole, both George Bushes, and, conspicuous among them, Ron Kirk. "It's like the Republican hall of fame," Kirk says, "and then there's this fly in the buttermilk, so to speak."

Reed met Kirk when she was asked

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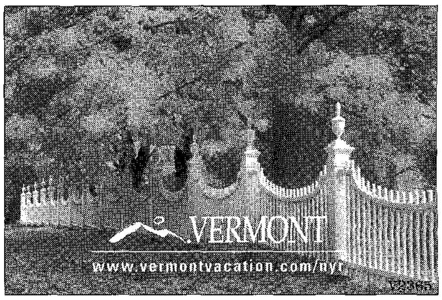

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to participate in a discussion panel after the 1994 election, the year that Newt Gingrich and the Republicans took the House. Kirk was a last-minute fill-in for a Democratic panelist. Reed was instantly struck by Kirk, who displayed humor and moderation. "I just sensed in my gut from that first time we did anything together that this guy was destined for something, something more than just being mayor—although mayor would be an exciting place to start," she says.

For years, Dallas was more or less an oligarchy, with the downtown business élites effectively choosing the candidates for city council who were deemed good for business. Then, in the late nineteen-eighties, minority leaders brought a suit that eventually forced a districting change, which made the council both more representative and, inevitably, more fractious. Any council member could speak until he was weary, and any member could unilaterally place an item on the city agenda. The city's fissures opened and settled into standing disputes. A staple of Dallas television news programs was the scene of a reporter standing outside City Hall late into the evening, as the council flailed away, to little result, inside. Rival cities, such as Atlanta, were said to use tapes of Dallas's noisy governance as foils in their efforts to recruit corporations.

Kirk promised to change all that. Reed introduced Kirk to those important downtown leaders he didn't already know, and a consensus soon formed—but with the obvious caveat. "I'd hear, 'I'd love to see this happen, but this city isn't ready to elect a black man,'" Reed recalls. "Well, bull*shit*."

Kirk began his campaign by directly addressing the divisiveness that had made city politics an embarrassment. "For too long, Dallas has been divided by more than rivers and highways," he said in announcing his candidacy. "It's time for the scapegoating to stop. The blame game is over, and nobody has won." The "blame game" line became his campaign slogan.

Kirk handily defeated six opponents without a runoff. And he made good on his campaign promise to bring order to city government—even though Dallas has a "weak mayor" government, and the office is nominally a part-time job. (Gardere kept Kirk on its payroll, with a salary of more than two hundred thousand dollars a year.) The man and the city turned out to be perfectly suited to each other: a natural-born salesman reigning over a town devoted to the next big deal. Early in his tenure, Kirk persuaded members of the city council to change its rules. "It was behind the scenes, it was cajoling, it was prayer, it was threat, it was kisses, it was hugs," he explains. "And it was also just getting them to buy into the notion that we can do better together, let's just try it." If the new system was less democratic, that did not particularly bother Kirk, who has some sympathy for the old oligarchy. ("I'm not saying it was right, but it was a terribly efficient way to do business," he says. "Real easy to build consensus.") Kirk was not known as an especially contemplative politician—"Not one for details" is a common assessment—but few doubted his ability to strike a deal. Rufus Shaw, a political consultant and a local commentator, says, "Ron Kirk could sell slavery. And there'd be a few who'd volunteer weekly."

Shaw is a sympathizer of a group of black leaders he calls "the Mau-Maus," activists whose style was agitation, and who did not spare Kirk. "We just thought he was too conservative," Shaw says, "too much serving the interests of the white business community that paid for his campaign." In much of Dallas, though, such criticism only enhanced Kirk's standing. "He's not a special-interest guy," Lucy Billingsley says. Anyone who had worried that Kirk might become Dallas's David Dinkins were delighted to discover that he was more like Rudy Giuliani—the political figure to whom Kirk, in my conversations with him, most often made reference.

During Kirk's tenure, crime fell and taxes were cut, which pleased white Dallas. But, despite his occasional tiffs with community leaders, Kirk was also able to hold the near-total support of Dallas's blacks. This gave him a powerful coalition—the backing of downtown business, plus a solid bloc of minority votes—that enabled him to push through several big bond issues, which formed the heart of what he called his "grand vision." One was a two-hundred-and-thirty-million-dollar proposal for a new sports arena downtown, narrowly passed in early 1998, which kept the city's N.B.A. team, the Mavericks, and its N.H.L. team, the Stars, in town. Later that year, Kirk proposed a half-billion-dollar bond project for development along the Trinity River, which divides Dallas culturally as well as physically. Both projects were priorities of the Dallas business élite, and, again, Kirk was criticized for supporting the downtown planners and developers. Many local activists opposed the Trinity project, on the ground that blacks weren't getting a fair share of its benefits, and threatened to try to scuttle it. Jim Schutze, a consistent Kirk critic at the Dallas *Observer*, the city's alternative weekly, wrote that the deal proved that "as a black man Ron Kirk has exactly the same right as any white S.O.B. to con voters and sell them down the river like fools." Kirk had a moral rationale for the Trinity project—development brings money and jobs to the city, jobs bring families that will eventually invest themselves in the city's decaying schools, and so on—but the outcome ultimately depended on his ability to negotiate and cut deals. After weeks of talks, Kirk, in the late hours, was able to offer promises of minority contracts and the development of a wetlands park. His efforts worked: the protest was called off.

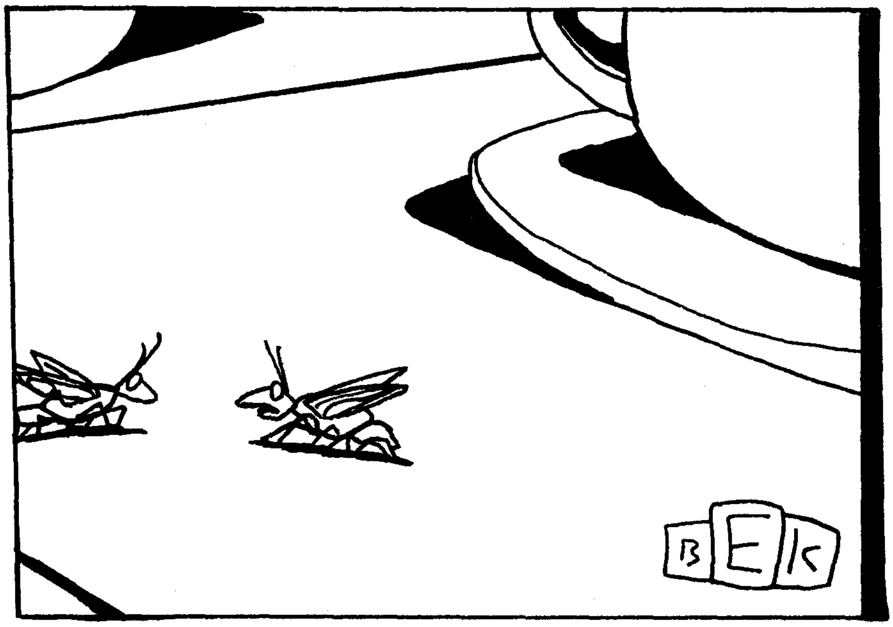
"Well, you've met him," Rufus Shaw explains. "He can work a room. He knows how to feel a room, who needs to be moved, and how, and he just can do it."

It was an airless mid-July afternoon in New York City, so wretchedly hot that the passing dogs outside Jimmy's Downtown, a restaurant on East Fifty-seventh Street, lapped indolently at the water kept outside the door by the proprietor but mostly passed on the free biscuits. A few minutes after six, Ron Kirk came into view, walking over from Sutton Place, slowly, as if he had surveyed the scene that awaited him and was in no hurry to reach it. Kirk was in town, and at Jimmy's, to attend a fund-raising reception in his honor, with Bill Clinton as the featured guest, and several Texas newspaper reporters and television crews stood outside the restaurant with the dogs. There was also a one-man crew from Fox News. When Kirk reached them, the first question was the one he clearly expected: "Mr. Kirk, considering that Bill Clinton is radioactive in Texas, does it hurt you to be seen with Bill Clinton?"

On one level, Clinton's support is great news for Kirk. When Clinton tops the bill at your fund-raiser, you've made the Democratic Party's A-list. Donors will pay, as they did at Jimmy's that night, twenty-five thousand dollars to co-chair an event, ten thousand dollars for a supper of roast chicken and fried-artichoke salad, or a thousand just to have a drink beforehand. But in Texas, Kirk well knows, his appearance with Clinton—in New York!—reveals what Republicans see as his greatest vulnerability: the assertion that while Kirk may seem like a new-paradigm moderate in Dallas, what he really is, or surely would become if he were elected, is just another national Democrat.

The chief Republican operative in John Cornyn's race against Kirk in Texas is Dave Beckwith, a ferocious competitor and a veteran of some hardball campaigns. Whenever Kirk leaves Texas for a fund-raiser, Beckwith's face lights up over the gleeful possibilities. In June, while Kirk was visiting Washington for an event co-hosted by Hillary Clinton, Beckwith dispatched a video crew to the scene, in the hope of capturing Kirk in the act of consorting with a Clinton. When the most recent campaign-finance reports were filed, Beckwith immediately pointed out that nearly half of Kirk's second-quarter contributors live outside Texas. "What state does Ron Kirk expect to represent in the U.S. Senate?" one Cornyn press release asked. "In the past three months, Kirk has made six trips to Washington, plus other stops to raise money from liberals in Hollywood, San Francisco, New York City, Las Vegas, Detroit and elsewhere—while virtually ignoring key areas of the Lone Star State."

The subtext of these charges is that a vote for Ron Kirk is a vote for Tom Daschle and the Senate liberals and a vote against George W. Bush and his policies. In that, the Cornyn campaign is probably not far wrong. Kirk is pro-choice, and he opposes public funding for school vouchers. He's a tax-cutter, but he would have suspended Bush's tax rollback when the national budget fell back into deficit. He does not favor drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, in Alaska. On the subject of Senate Democrats' tying up Bush's judicial nominees—a real concern in Texas—Kirk wobbles a bit. He has publicly endorsed one Bush nominee for the federal bench, David Godbey, but Godbey happens to be the husband of one of Kirk's law partners and is a relatively uncontroversial nominee. The question of Justice Priscilla Owen, of the Texas Supreme Court, is stickier for Kirk. Owen, nominated by Bush more than a year ago for the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, is generally regarded as a brilliant jurist. But she is also a pronounced conservative, with a pro-life bent. *The Nation* calls her a "right-wing radical," the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League paints her as an extremist, and Ted Kennedy has declared that her nomination is "controversial."



"The first step is to say to yourself, 'Yes, I'm pesky.'"

• •

When I asked Kirk how he would vote on Owen, he said, "I think there's a substantive philosophical difference in approach to justice of a Priscilla Owen and a David Godbey." So he would vote against her. However, he said, he would not vote to keep her nomination bottled up in committee. "I think everybody ought to be voted on," he said.

Kirk insists that he often agrees with President Bush, saying that if "President Bush can work with Teddy Kennedy"—on the education package—"he can damn sure work with Ron Kirk." In any case, Kirk says, the Senate race in Texas is not a referendum on George Bush. "I don't think there's anybody in America who's conflicted about how much Texas loves the President."

That statement encapsulates the balancing act that is central to Kirk's candidacy. Texas Democrats, relying on what the professionals call an "energized base"—a high turnout among blacks and Hispanics—have contrived a theme for the coming election which Kirk seems to find grating. He and the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, Tony Sanchez—a multimillionaire who contributed to Bush's last campaign for governor—are part of what has been dubbed the Democrats' "dream team," reflecting the hope that Sanchez will bring out Hispanics, Kirk will attract blacks, and enough whites will vote for the two moderates to create a victory. But the dream-team concept suggests the very identity politics that Kirk has spent his political career avoiding. When he is asked about it, he says, "It wasn't my idea." Although the campaigns will try to avoid any overt reference to race, both camps know that it is the principal subtext of the contest, and that being part of what Cornyn's spokesman Dave Beckwith once referred to as "a racial-quota system" can hurt Kirk as much as being seen as a Clinton crony.

To the journalists outside Jimmy's who were asking about his association with Clinton, Kirk responded with a stock answer: "I'm not going to apologize for the fact that I've got a lot of friends who think that I'll be a good U.S. senator, and I'm not going to apologize for the fact that Bill Clinton's one of them." No, he said, the former President will not be coming to Texas for an appearance with him. "The President is a big boy. He understands," Kirk said.

Kirk stepped in to greet his guests, but the reporters were kept outside. The Fox News man's assignment sheet had the instruction "Ideal pix try to get Bill Clinton and Kirk in one frame." Clinton is not unpopular in New York, of course, and a crowd had gathered. At seven-fifteen, there was a flurry of Secret Service activity; an agent spoke into the sleeve of her black blazer and then hurried into the restaurant. But Clinton wasn't in sight. Later, after the crowd had dispersed, a red-haired neighborhood woman in her sixties stopped to say, "He's inside already. The doorman told me. He entered through the kitchen door in the back." Clinton and the Kirk campaign had avoided the "ideal pix."

Kirk really has no choice but to attend events like the one with Clinton if he hopes to keep up with John Cornyn, and it is even possible that being a national figure won't harm him in Texas. Cornyn may look the part, but, judging from the one public performance of his that I witnessed, he has no obvious stage magic. Cornyn is a man with a gracious manner, who speaks in the reasoned, moderated tone of a judge—Lewis Stone as Mickey Rooney's clear-sighted father in the "Andy Hardy" movies. The son of a career military officer, Cornyn describes himself as "a George Bush Republican," with a philosophy of "compassionate conservatism." As evidence, he points to what he ranks as his highest achievement as Attorney General—a vigorous enforcement program bringing deadbeat parents to account. His pitch is so understated—"I merit election based on my own record and based on my value system, which, I believe, reflects mainstream Texas values"—that the acerbic presence of Dave Beckwith in the campaign is a necessary complement.

Even when Cornyn is asked to assess Kirk's tenure as mayor of Dallas, he declines the chance to deride. "I would say that in the job that he ran for, and had, as mayor, by most accounts, he did a good job. And I will certainly grant him that." Cornyn is also aware of Kirk's charm. "I have never run against somebody who ran strictly on his personality," he says.

Cornyn becomes most animated when he is asked about Kirk's emergence as a celebrity in national Democratic circles. "I think what it says is that Ron Kirk is out of touch with the people of Texas, and that he's spending his time with, and raising his money from, people who do not share the values of the people of Texas." Cornyn's principal hope, and the chief imperative of his campaign, is to break through Kirk's charisma and expose his position on issues, such as abortion and judicial appointments, that are to the left of what he believes to be the Texas mainstream.

But Texas loves politicians with big personalities, as I was reminded when Kirk told me that he is reading the third volume of Robert A. Caro's L.B.J. biography, "Master of the Senate." Caro depicts Johnson as being one of the greatest political dealmakers who ever lived. "If you pick it up and you're running for Senate," Kirk remarked, "you say, 'That's why I'm doing this thing!' "

Kirk may be thinking wishfully when he says that the people of Texas will not have Tom Daschle or George Bush on their minds when they cast their votes for the Senate, but he was almost certainly correct that the race boiled down to the question of whether or not white Texans would vote for a black man. That is the compelling aspect of his campaign—its quest to convince white voters that, based on Kirk's record in Dallas, they can vote for Ron Kirk not for reasons of guilt or piety but for reasons of self-interest.

"This is our Colin Powell," says Rufus Shaw, who worried that Kirk was too conservative as mayor of Dallas. "This is as close as a black politician can come to being inoffensive to the Anglo community, without becoming a Republican. If Texas doesn't vote for him, it's going to say something about Texas, and it will not be very good." ♦

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

URBAN LEGENDS

The do-it-yourself success of They Might Be Giants.

BY MICHAEL AZERRAD

John Flansburgh and John Linnell—partners in the musical duo They Might Be Giants—were on their way out of a trendy little restaurant in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, when the young waiter who had served them caught up to them. "You make good music," he said solemnly, then moved on. On the face of it, this was not a momentous event, but Flansburgh was beaming. "That was *absolutely* flattering," he said as we arrived at the studio he maintains in his former apartment, a few blocks from the restaurant. "I think we've got a nice kind of fame."

They Might Be Giants have released nine albums in sixteen years, are about to issue a career-spanning boxed set, and have been touring widely since Reagan was in the White House. Two witty, articulate men in their early forties who write catchy songs about things like thermostats and metal detectors, Flansburgh and Linnell are the elders to a whole generation of smart, earnest "nerd rockers"—Moxy Früvous, Barenaked Ladies, Harvey Danger, and Weezer, to name just a few. But, as highly respected, seminal bands often are, They Might Be Giants tend to be commercial runners-up to their offspring. (As David Bowie once put it, "It's not who does it first, it's who does it second.")

Still, it turns out, that's not such a bad thing. In an industry addicted to blockbusters, most bands don't rest in the middle ground for long; they either go on to greater things or, more often, drop back into obscurity. But They Might Be Giants, a band that's run like a grass-roots political campaign, has inhabited that rarefied limbo for most of what Flansburgh calls their "tortoise-like career." The Giants gross between one and two million dollars a year, a sum that would barely cover Mariah Carey's manicure budget, but which, even after expenses, provides Flansburgh and Linnell with a tidy income and that most elusive of commodities artistic freedom. They probably won't ever get filthy rich, but they do earn a comfortable living doing exactly what they want to do, which makes them the envy of many far more commercially successful artists. Along with a select few—performers as disparate as Fugazi, Robyn Hitchcock, and Lucinda Williams—Flansburgh and Linnell

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John Linnell, left, and John Flansburgh run their band like a grass-roots political campaign. Photograph by Suzanna Howe.

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If a nerd is someone whose every word and deed are predicated on the belief that appearing smart is more important than getting laid, then They Might Be Giants are, in fact, nerds: their music doesn't sell sex; it sells smart-kid whimsy. Arty, melodic, and well wrought in a formal way, it bristles with wordplay and musical ideas. Its references are not to such totems of cool as the Velvet Underground and Leonard Cohen but to quirky styles ranging from polka and commercial country to cartoon music. So it's hardly surprising that They Might Be Giants have a disproportionately large presence on the Geek Broadcasting System, also known as the Internet. The Giants started a Web site back in 1994 and soon rivalled much more famous bands—Pearl Jam, U2, and Nirvana—in online popularity. Thanks to their Internet following, Linnell was voted one of *People Online's* ten most beautiful people in 1998, and at one point Flansburgh ranked high in the Person of the Century poll on *Time's* Web site, coming in just behind Jesus, Adolf Hitler, and the pro wrestler Ric Flair.

The two Johns long ago settled on a division of labor, or, as Linnell's wife, Karen Brown, puts it, "Flansburgh is Madonna and Linnell is Elton John." A natural musician, Linnell is the stronger singer and has written most of the duo's best-known songs, but he isn't keen on the hustling and schmoozing needed to pilot a band out of obscurity. "Linnell, if left to his own devices, would probably be writing brilliant music in his bedroom, and maybe his friends would hear it and go, 'Wow,' " the band's manager, Jamie Kitman, says. Linnell's nickname is the Professor and, in his customary pocket T-shirt and sneakers, he does have the benignly dishevelled air of a graduate student. He is slight and flop-haired, and the heavy black glasses he sometimes wears sit crookedly on his nose. The last time I saw him, the glasses were held together with electrical tape, because his three-year-old son had given them a thrashing.

Whereas Linnell can seem aloof, Flansburgh is outgoing. With designer glasses, a precise haircut, and button-down shirts, he is a classic overachiever, supervising everything from stage backdrops to album covers. He hires and fires the road crew, meets with distributors and marketing executives, gives most of the interviews, and generally acts as the band's link to the outside world. He befriends artists, actors, and journalists, and shepherds through projects like the thirty-six tracks that the Giants recorded to accompany a recent issue of the literary journal *McSweeney's*. Before a show, Flansburgh runs around dealing with last-minute details; Linnell often takes a nap.

Neither band member seems to resent the other for this arrangement, and so far it's worked very well. Not that either would complain if it hadn't. Kitman calls Flansburgh and Linnell "Yankee Puritans." He adds, "There's a part of them that's really Wasp. They don't say the things that we Jews would say to each other. People say, 'Get it out and then you can forgive each other.' Why even go there? If you don't say it, then you don't have to forgive it."

Flansburgh and Linnell grew up in the sixties and seventies in Lincoln, Massachusetts, an affluent, old-money Boston suburb that borders Walden Pond. "There's a New England trip that we were indoctrinated into," Flansburgh says, "a culture of grim-faced simplicity and work ethic and this direct relationship to everything that goes from the Pilgrim fathers right through Emerson."

Flansburgh's father runs a large architecture firm that specializes in building schools; his mother started the nonprofit tour company Boston-by-Foot. Linnell's father is a psychiatrist; his mother is a poet. Both men say that the time and place they grew up in is perfectly encapsulated in their friend Rick Moody's novel "The Ice Storm." "All these people had made all this money, and they were in this green place in the woods in these modernistic cubes with really high-end jobs," Linnell says. "But they were growing sideburns and cheating on each other, going berserk. People of my generation saw it as a kind of object lesson. The thing that I drew from it was actually more of an attitude of 'Get your shit together.' "

The two met while they were in high school, and started making recordings together, Linnell playing saxophone and keyboards while Flansburgh messed with

"You'll get a chuckle out of what Maureen Dowd says about you in today's 'Times.'"

a reel-to-reel tape deck. Both were paying close attention to Boston's WBCN, which was at the time a free-form radio station, whose d.j.s played not only the latest punk rock but also Miles Davis, "Mickey Mouse Club" songs, Firesign Theatre sketches, and George Jones. Linnell and Flansburgh had noticed the Beatles delving into music hall, tape collage, Indian classical, and Baroque; and, like most kids, they were bombarded with cartoon music, ad jingles, and TV themes. "Changing channels is our biggest tradition," Flansburgh once told a *Spin* reporter.

Linnell lasted a year at the University of Massachusetts before leaving to play with a New Wave band called the Mundanes, while Flansburgh bounced from school to school, teaching himself to play the guitar. On the same day in 1981, they both happened to move into a dilapidated Park Slope row house where a number of their high-school friends were living. They began playing music together again the following year, and they made their début that summer, introduced as "El Grupo de Rock & Roll," at a Sandinista rally in Central Park. (They soon named themselves They Might Be Giants, after a 1971 film starring George C. Scott.) Flansburgh, on guitar, and Linnell, on accordion—the instrument became a hallmark of the band—played as a duo mostly because they had little chance of finding anyone else who thought the way they did; besides, they made more by dividing the money only two ways. Their "backing band" was a tape deck that played homemade samplings of a Moog synthesizer, a drum machine, Music Minus One records, tape loops, and old rhythm machines that wheezed out foxtrots and rumbas.

Although the punk scene that had originally attracted the two to New York was already a fading memory, cheap rents allowed artists to stay in the city, and East Village clubs began to host a kind of postmodern vaudeville, featuring a new genre called performance art. It was the perfect place for a band that sported song titles like "Boat of Car" and "Youth Culture Killed My Dog," and They Might Be Giants began to build up a following at underground clubs like 8 B.C., Darinka, and Neither/Nor. Fellow-musicians such as Laurie Anderson, Frank Maya, and even Talking Heads were using performance-art-inspired props. Linnell and Flansburgh wore papier-mâché monster hands and outsized fezzes and banged an amplified tree branch on the stage floor. They once invited everyone in the audience to bring an instrument to a performance at the Pyramid Club, where transvestite waiters served Blue Whales and about a hundred people wielding acoustic guitars played "Mr. Tambourine Man" along with the band. Soon, the Giants were appearing on bills with performers ranging from Ann Magnuson and Steve Buscemi to a young man with no arms who walked onstage in a dress and stripped naked as another man counted backward from a hundred in German.

They Might Be Giants were also developing what the music industry now calls "alternative marketing strategies." Their first release, in early 1985, was a flexi-disk, a floppy plastic record usually stapled into magazines, which they sold via mail order, handed out at shows, and sometimes nailed to trees in Tompkins Square Park. Two years earlier, they'd transferred some recordings they'd made to their telephone answering machine, which was then a novel piece of technology. They advertised the resulting "Dial-a-Song" phone line—which they still run, with a new song nearly every day, at (718) 387-6962—in the *Village Voice.* In a way, Dial-a-Song was a prototype for streaming audio on the Internet—a readily accessible music-delivery system. True, the Giants didn't make any money from it (when Paula Abdul and New Kids on the Block followed suit, years later, they used 900 numbers), but it established a personal, everyday connection with their fans. Virtually all of the several hundred songs that Flansburgh and Linnell have recorded have played, in various states of completion, on Dial-a-Song; low-tech, low-cost, and astonishingly effective, it remains one of the key ways in which people are introduced to the band.

In 1983, Jamie Kitman was preparing for a career as a lawyer when a friend took him to a seedy downtown club to see They Might Be Giants. A former *Spy* magazine contributor and political consultant, Kitman helped They Might Be Giants attract a following beyond the East Village, and soon the clubs they played were full of young people with media jobs in midtown who were just catching on to the performance-art scene. "They Might Be Giants were the kind of experience that wasn't only for your serious performance-art junkies," Kitman says. "You could take your friends from out of town, and it wasn't like you'd be watching paint dry or somebody getting his skin ripped off."

By the summer of 1986, the buzz had reached the offices of *People*, which gave a rave review to a twenty-three-song cassette the band was selling. The Giants had a video, too. Directed by the fledgling auteur Adam Bernstein, "Put Your Hand Inside the Puppet Head" was shot for only a few hundred dollars. The low-budget clip had a jittery energy: while Robert Palmer, in his videos, was crooning in designer suits, surrounded by automatonic beauties, They Might Be Giants wore ill-fitting thrift-shop clothes and danced on the garbage-strewn waterfront of Williamsburg.

Since 1983, the Giants had been recording songs at tiny Manhattan studios in the middle of the night, when the rates were lowest and no one would notice if they ran overtime. When their eponymous début album came out, in late 1986, on Bar/None, a record label based in Hoboken, New Jersey, the music had the intimate quality of a home recording. It was constructed almost entirely of synthetic sounds, partly in homage to the proletarian dance music that blasted from open windows and car stereos in Fort Greene, where Linnell and Flansburgh were living then. A drum machine gave the music a campy, herky-jerky feel, and the two men sang in heraldic, nasal tones that recalled the Phil Ochs records that Flansburgh had grown up listening to. What fired They Might Be Giants' art was not so much emotional yearning as the craft of songwriting itself. "I think our songwriting has tried to deal with some very subtle, almost aesthetic ideas that are well beyond writing a lyric about romance," Flansburgh says. The lyrics of the songs on that first album, as on most of those which followed, were profoundly enigmatic. (There is a Web site devoted to fans' often far-reaching interpretations of Giants lyrics: " 'Particle Man' concerns the nature of the life, the universe and everything," goes one line of thought. " 'Triangle Man' has also been interpreted to represent change, religion, the homosexual community, and is a reference to a quantum physics phenomenon as well.")

They Might Be Giants toured in support of the album for about a year. Money was tight, so Kitman, who did freelance articles for the magazine *Automobile*, finagled an assignment to road-test a Plymouth Voyager—the first minivan—on the Giants' nineteen-city, fifty-two-hundred-mile "Bring Me the Head of Kenny Rogers World Tour '87." When the band played Pittsburgh's now defunct Electric Banana, there were only twenty-seven people in the club, and Kitman was deeply discouraged. "I was saying, 'Let's just go home,' and the Giants were saying, 'No, no,' " he recalls. "And they went out and shook everybody's hand in the audience and then played the best show I'd ever seen them play." One member of the audience was a programming executive for a local radio station, WXDX; the next day, WXDX became the first commercial station in the country to add They Might Be Giants to its playlist. The single "Don't Let's Start" later became a hit on the influential K-Rock station in Los Angeles, and Bar/None struggled to keep up with demand for the record. Adam Bernstein shot a video for "Don't Let's Start," and in January of 1988 it became one of the first independent-label videos to air regularly on MTV. Sales of the album exploded, going from around a thousand a month to about fifty thousand the month the video entered heavy rotation.

In May of 1990, as the lights went down before a They Might Be Giants show at the Beacon Theatre, in New York, there was a faint high-pitched sound—perhaps an amplifier onstage was feeding back. As it got louder, it began to resemble the whine of a jet plane. And then, suddenly, it became clear what the sound was: thousands of girls screaming for John and John. In the spring of that year, the band had scored a surprise Top Five hit in the U.K. with "Birdhouse in Your Soul," an anthemic number told from the point of view of an emotionally needy night-light. And after the release, the previous January, of "Flood," the band's third album, and its first for a major label, Elektra, the Giants had begun to tour relentlessly, in order to generate interest in the next album, which was expected to be their breakthrough in the United States.

In the event, "Apollo 18," which came out in 1992, failed to yield a hit, and the screaming girls moved on to other bands. Since the release of "Flood," more aggressive grunge bands like Nirvana and Pearl Jam had come along and redefined the industry's idea of what was marketable, and many of the Giants' supporters at Elektra were leaving the company. "All of a sudden, people weren't happy to see us," Kitman recalls. "They were already saying, 'O.K., time's up.' " Elektra lent lacklustre support to the next two albums, and the band and the label parted ways in 1997. At this point, many groups would have given up, but Flansburgh and Linnell simply got back to work and started looking for innovative ways to stay afloat.

One of the first things they tried was the fledgling idea of Internet distribution. The band's "Long Tall Weekend," which sold more than twenty-five thousand copies through eMusic.com, became the most downloaded-for-pay album ever. Flansburgh shrugs off this accomplishment, saying that it's "like being the world's tallest midget," since any major-label band that sold so few copies would get dropped. But They Might Be Giants were successful pioneers. "They proved that downloadable music could be sold on the Internet," Jim Stabile, who was then eMusic's director of artist relations, says. Since the band rarely gets played on the radio or MTV these days, the availability of its songs online is still a major component of its popularity—fans share the music with friends via e-mail, thereby multiplying the band's following. The Giants first grasped the power of the Internet on tour, when audiences began applauding the opening notes of songs that hadn't been released on CD yet.

The band remains a big draw on the college circuit; at university shows, there are inevitably seventeen guys in the audience with "T-H-E-Y-M-I-G-H-T-B-E-G-I-A-N-T-S" painted on their bare chests. "They tie in to some pubescent, smart-kid mind-set, and it's a perennial," Glenn Morrow, the co-owner of Bar/None Records, says. "They're Pied Pipers for those kids." The band has been going for so long that many of the bright kids who discovered it in college have now assumed positions of power, particularly in the media. When the band wrote the song "Dr. Evil," for "Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me," in 1999, the film's co-producer and star, Mike Myers, a longtime fan, insisted on placing it in the opening scene. Flansburgh and Linnell were then introduced to another admirer, Linwood Boomer, the creator of the sitcom "Malcolm in the Middle," who asked if they'd be interested in doing a theme song for the new show; Flansburgh offered to write the incidental music, too, and he and Linnell spent the better part of the next two years working up an episode's worth of music every week. They provided music for "The Daily Show," hosted by Jon Stewart, whom they'd known since he was a bartender at the City Gardens club, in Trenton, New Jersey. And Linnell's birthday was recently announced on Fox News, clearly because the band had a fan on the staff.

They Might Be Giants have also broken into the world of advertising, making music for Coca-Cola, Diet Dr. Pepper, Chrysler, and Weber grills. And they have recorded a children's album, called "No!," complete with charming interactive content, which was released this June and hit the top of the *Billboard* kids' chart. "No!" was an artistic breakthrough, taking the band back to the vocal-intensive, sound-driven approach of its early years, a reversion that had an appealing influence on last fall's "Mink Car," its most recent album for adults.

Last summer, They Might Be Giants played a mini-tour, the kind of low-key trip that helps a band like theirs keep going between albums. The first stop was the Fourth Annual Sunset Music Festival, in Newport, Rhode Island, where other artists included mellow baby boomers like David Crosby and Livingston Taylor. It wasn't the hippest gig, but then ones that pay the bills rarely are.

In the bright sunshine outside the band's trailer stood Nathaniel, a sixteen-year-old with a patch of bleached hair and a green camouflage T-shirt spiffed up with a skinny tie; his friend Chris had glasses, braces, and a skinny tie of his own. What drew them to They Might Be Giants? I asked. "They sing about Presidents and 'Planet of the Apes,' " Nathaniel explained. "It's not all about girls." "I think there should be a dork-rock tour of Weezer, They Might Be Giants, Harvey Danger," Chris exclaimed, apropos of nothing in particular. "That'd be awesome! A whole crowd of people just like me!"

Despite fans like these, things weren't going in the Giants' favor that night: only about nine hundred people had bought tickets to a venue that holds twice that number, the police hassled the soundman about the decibel level, and someone kept flipping on the house lights. But eventually a few brave souls got up to dance; others joined in, and suddenly there was a dance party right in front of the stage. "Last night was a victory," Flansburgh pronounced the next morning at the Providence airport. "Here's to perseverance."

Their next gig, a free outdoor show in Nashville, was much more successful. Some fifteen thousand people watched the band pump out a strong performance on a barge tethered to the shore of the Cumberland River. Afterward, Flansburgh did a meet-and-greet session with fans, off to the side of the stage, as he has done since the band started. He worked a long line—at least a hundred people—like a politician, tirelessly shaking hands, signing autographs, getting his picture taken with smiling fans, enthusiastically answering questions about the band. He stayed until he had met everybody—well over an hour. As the last people in line, a couple of twenty-something guys, strolled off into the night, Flansburgh called out, "See ya in the pit, fellas!"

The Giants will probably never play to audiences this size on a regular basis, but that's O.K. with them. Sales of "Mink Car" suffered because it happened to be released on September 11th, and shortly afterward their current record label, Restless, drastically reorganized. But, in many ways, things have never been better for Flansburgh and Linnell: the theme song from "Malcolm in the Middle" won a Grammy this year; they are the subject of a full-length documentary called "Gigantic (A Tale of Two Johns)"; and on August 15th they'll be playing a twentieth-anniversary show at Central Park's SummerStage, a stone's throw from the spot where they made their début. (This time, they won't have to carry their equipment over a stone wall.) "We lowered our expectations right away," Flansburgh says. "That's been very useful in having an enduring career in rock." He adds, "Is this a good enough life for us? I think the answer is pretty clear: yeah. We roll down the road with people cheering as the bus pulls away. There are a lot of harder things to do in the world." ♦

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LETTER FROM PAKISTAN

THE GENERAL IN HIS LABYRINTH

Where will Pervez Musharraf lead his country?

BY ISABEL HILTON

In the early afternoon of June 14th, I stepped out of the Karachi airport into suffocating heat. When there was no sign of the car that was supposed to pick me up, I found a taxi; as we entered the city and neared the Marriott Hotel, the streets seemed to be under military siege. We inched through traffic, trying a succession of approaches to the hotel, but were turned back each time by grim lines of heavily armed soldiers. Finally, we found a way to the rear entrance. As I got out of the car, I felt broken glass crunch under my shoes. When I looked up, I saw that almost all the windows had been blown out of the first five floors.

At eleven that morning, someone had attempted to ram a car packed with explosives into the wall of the United States Consulate, next door. Twelve Pakistanis had died in the explosion, and some fifty more had been injured. Among the dead were a group of young women who had just passed their driving tests, a man and his niece, who was about to get married, and two security guards. A row of hotel shops had been destroyed.

In a park opposite the consulate, guards detailed to keep out onlookers were clustered in the shade; the grass was strewn with debris. Pieces of metal had rained down on the consul's residence, three hundred yards away. People had rushed out of their rooms at the exclusive Sindh Club to find that an arm had been blown over the roof of the building and landed in the parking lot. A torso fell into a gas station beyond the park. Pieces of shattered vehicles and shreds of body parts had lodged in the trees.

Some three weeks later, a group of suspects from one of Pakistan's hard-line Islamist groups confessed to the bombing, adding one telling detail: the car bomb, they said, had been built for an assassination attempt on Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's President and its Chief of Army Staff—the head of the Army—but had failed to detonate. Although Musharraf this time was nowhere close to the explosion, there was no doubt that the man accused by his enemies of playing lapdog to the United States—and whose popular nickname is Busharraf—was as much the target as the United States.

It was no coincidence that this terrorist attack took place in Karachi, a city of around twelve million people. On its crowded streets one can find most of the problems plaguing Pakistan itself, a nation that seems to combine quasi-democratic institutions, authoritarian regimes, and anarchic violence. Yet if Musharraf is to fulfill his ambitions, he must deal with the country's alarmingly high rates of illiteracy, violence, and economic failure, while facing a great many hostile forces: Islamic fundamentalists who distrust his policies and threaten his life; a political opposition that would easily control a majority in an elected parliament, although its leaders live in exile; and even much of the middle class, which has become disillusioned with his military rule. The Army has governed Pakistan for more than half of the country's fifty-five-year history, and Pervez Musharraf, whom I had come to Pakistan to interview, is, above all, an Army man.

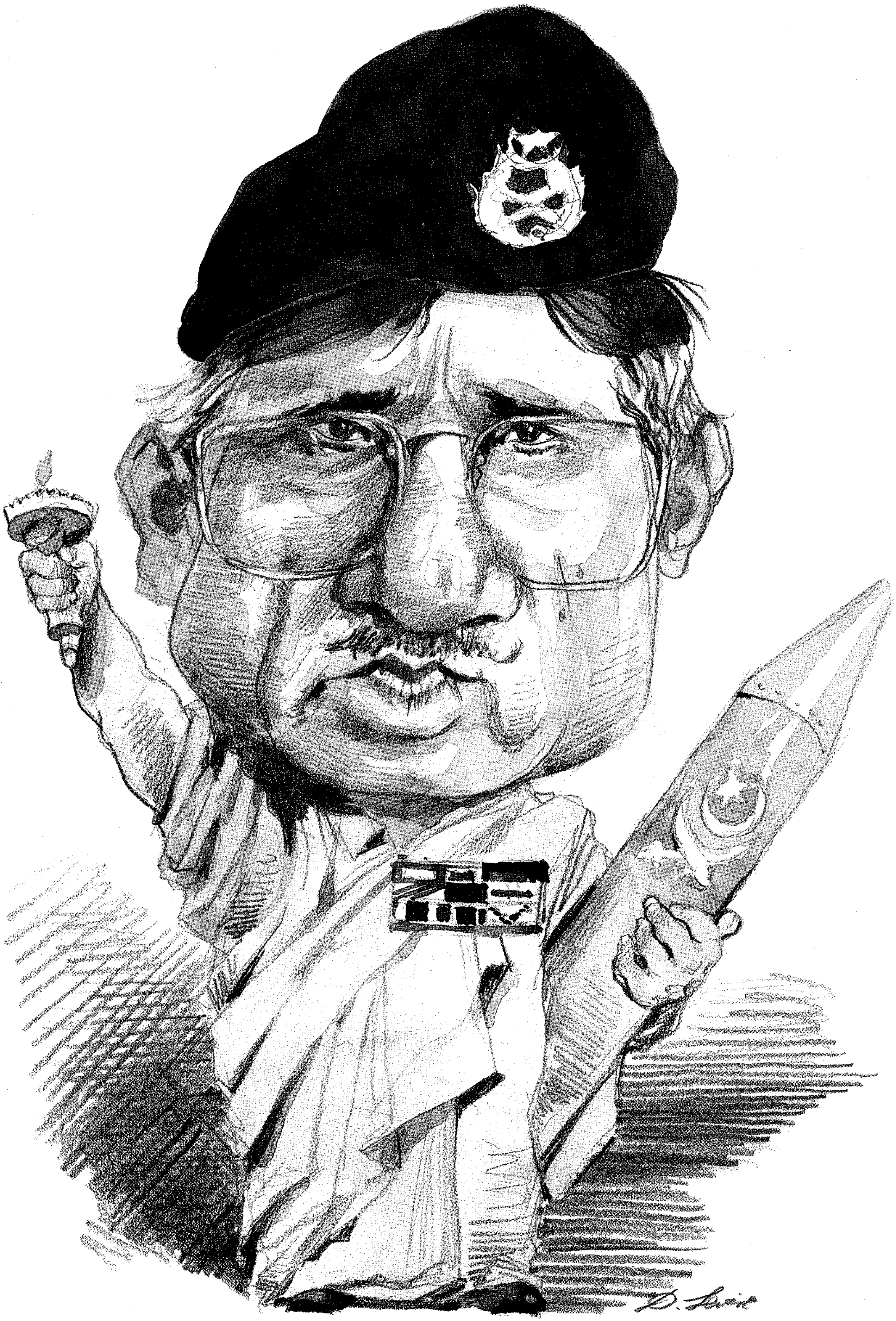
Soon after I arrived, Fahim Zaman, a former mayor of Karachi, showed me some of the sights—many of them reminders of the recent, unsettled past, as well as warnings to the Musharraf regime. We drove by the Sheraton Hotel, where eleven French engineers working on a submarine project and three others died in a bomb blast in May. Nearby was a bridge where four employees of an American oil company were gunned down in 1997; a little farther on, we passed the site where two Iranian engineers were killed in 1998 and, not far away, the restaurant where the journalist Daniel Pearl was abducted.

We went past the fortresslike house of Benazir Bhutto, who was twice Pakistan's Prime Minister, and who now lives in self-imposed exile in Dubai. (Bhutto has hinted publicly that she might return, although she faces almost certain arrest.) Zaman pointed out the city's main storm drain, strewn with rubbish and lined with makeshift homes, where half a million people live, in danger from periodic flash floods that sweep through the drain when the rains come. We went into District West, where half the houses have no plumbing, and where a migrant population of Pashtuns, Afghans, and Biharis lives. As we drove through the bazaar, past flyblown camels and donkeys pulling overloaded carts, Zaman detailed the statistics of unemployment, corruption, and crime, of projects drowned in greed, of injustice and violent death.

Zaman talked of the Karachi that he had known as a child, in the nineteen-fifties. The city, built on the coastal desert and cooled by the breezes that blow from the Arabian Sea, had been an important industrial center and port, and it still generates seventy per cent of Pakistan's revenues. It was a gracious, orderly place whose elegant streets were washed once a day, and it was known for its lively bars and night clubs. Now the city is a palimpsest of failed regimes and threats of social collapse. When Pervez Musharraf took power, in the fall of 1999, he promised to reverse those failures, but, with Pakistan's internal stresses only worsened by all that has happened in the past eleven months, Musharraf is struggling to survive.

September 11, 2001, began as a routine day for Musharraf. He was in Karachi to address a conference of mayors when his military secretary gave him the news. At first, Musharraf thought that the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had something to do with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It did not occur to him that they originated in Afghanistan, a country ruled by Mullah Omar and the Taliban, whose closest

DAVID LEVINE



The Army is "the most stable, well-organized body in Pakistan," Musharraf says. "Elected governments played merry hell here."

"Parents holding you back, sir."

• •

ally was Pakistan. Two days later, President Bush called. It was decision time, Bush told him. "You are either with us or against us." Musharraf quickly decided to support the anti-Taliban coalition.

Much was made of the risks that Musharraf ran in standing with the United States, but in his Cabinet, at least, there was no dissent. Lieutenant General Javed Ashraf Qazi, the Minister of Communications and Railways, told me that the decision was unanimous: "The Taliban hadn't listened to us. They hadn't returned the fugitives"—a group of sectarian killers who had taken refuge in Afghanistan. "The Cabinet was of the view that we shouldn't stick our necks out for them. The might of the U.S. was a much greater risk. They were looking for a target. Why should it be us?"

A few days later, Musharraf explained his position to the nation in terms of Islamic pragmatism. Pakistan's core objectives, he said, were four: security, the development of the economy, the protection of strategic nuclear assets, and the securing of Kashmir. The decision he would take, he insisted, would further these goals.

But Pakistan's Army planners had assigned a strategic role to Afghanistan: if India invaded Pakistan, they argued, Pakistani forces could retreat into Afghanistan and fight back. In addition, Pakistan's large Pashtun minority identified strongly with Afghanistan, and its religious fundamentalists held up the Taliban as Islamic exemplars. The question was, how big a challenge would they, as well as malcontents in the armed forces, pose to Musharraf's power?

As if in answer to that question, street demonstrations erupted last October, as the American bombing campaign began. They were at their peak each Friday, when worshippers filled the streets following afternoon prayers. But the rallies were not large and the slogans had a tired sameness; by November, the protests had all but stopped. Musharraf reshuffled his government to ease out opposition and, on the streets, at least, he had little to fear.

In January, Musharraf delivered a strong rebuke to the fundamentalists in a speech that seemed to set the nation on a new path. He insisted that the fight against extremist groups was in Pakistan's interest and would be pursued, and the madrasahs—the religious schools that had proliferated during the jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan—would be brought into the mainstream. He announced that a number of extremist organizations were now banned, and that no group would be allowed to use the Kashmir question as an excuse for terrorism.

The country, apart from the outspoken religious lobby, seemed to welcome this speech; Musharraf continued the theme when he visited Washington in February and said that his aim was to bring the "real essence of democracy" to Pakistan. But although there will be elections in October, ordered by the Supreme Court, Musharraf's real commitment to democracy is uncertain.

Islamic fundamentalism continues to haunt Pakistan's politics. But a few weeks ago I visited Lahore, a Punjabi city that is considered the country's cultural capital, and there a friend offered to show me why fundamentalists remain a relatively minor force in Pakistan. We drove from Lahore to Kasur, more than an hour away, on a Thursday night—Thursday is when millions of devout Pakistanis visit the saints. The Wahhabi strain of Islam, which inspired young men to join the jihad, has no place for saints; even their grave sites are regarded as heretical. But Pakistan, like much of the subcontinent, owes its Islam to a different tradition, that of Sufi masters who claimed direct experience of God. In the Sufi tradition, there are hundreds of saints, chosen more or less by popular acclaim.

Outside Lahore, we visited a shrine dedicated to Bullhe Shah, an eighteenth-century poet and mystic. The shrine consisted of a series of courtyards with the tomb of Bullhe Shah at the center. My friend told me that Bullhe Shah broke the rules of the mullahs and was always in trouble with them, but his followers believed that he performed miracles, and these were evidence of God's grace. Outside, a group of musicians struck up a song in praise of the saint. A man stood up from the crowd, which was seated in a semicircle; he wore a white shalwar kameez and a green sash knotted around his head as a makeshift turban. He began to dance, lightly and gracefully, and as his pace picked up he tore off the turban and tied it around his waist. His long hair fell down his back; his head began to jerk violently from right to left, and then in circles, as his feet kept time with the drums. In the glow of the shrine's colored lights I could see the faces of the watching crowd, transfixed in sympathy. I thought of the madrasah students I had seen, bent over their Arabic texts, young men who believed that music and dancing were offensive to Allah. The emotions on display around me here seemed very far from that culture.

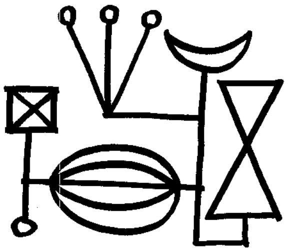
The next day, I visited Raza Kazim, a lawyer in Lahore and a veteran of many conflicts between the mullahs and the modern world. His most recent case had to do with whether it violates Islamic law for banks to charge interest. In 1992, the Federal Sharia Court, the country's highest religious court, which had been set up by Pakistan's former leader Zia ul-Haq, an authoritarian Islamic zealot, ruled that charging interest was forbidden; in 1999, a few months after Musharraf came to power, the Supreme Court upheld the judgment, and banks were forced into a variety of subterfuges to carry on their business.

I met Kazim in a large house that he had turned into a cultural center. He was upstairs, sitting cross-legged on a bed, drinking tea and smoking as he lamented the state of his country. "Do you understand Sharia?" Kazim asked. "It means a path—a way of life." Applied to the legal system, he explained, it gave the mullahs legal control of people's relationship to God. "When I was ten, I was reciting the Koran in Arabic with my teacher," he recalled. "My grandfather overheard me asking the teacher what it meant. He rebuked me. He said it was a sin to read the meaning of the Koran." He drew on his cigarette. "We are in the Dark Ages," he said.

In the bank case, his strategy was to argue that the court had acted illegally in reinterpreting the constitution, which was itself a statement of Islamic law. "Musharraf's advisers were against that approach, and eventually I had to persuade Musharraf himself," Kazim told me. "I doubted that he would follow the technical argument, so I decided to pitch it to him on his image of himself as the Army commander. I said I realize that what I am suggesting is a bold strategy that requires nerve. He said he had plenty of nerve." Kazim chuckled; he had won the case. Was Musharraf the man to lift the weight of dogma from Pakistan? I asked.

He grimaced. Musharraf was of the generation that had seen the spread of militant Islamic groups. "Musharraf believed in that. Personally, he is not corrupt, but he has coexisted with business as usual. And the glorification of incompetence is the first cousin of corruption." The decisions that followed September 11th, he said, had been entirely pragmatic. "The Army is clear about survival. Pragmatism said that concessions had to be made at the best possible price." But, in the face of Islamic opposition, Musharraf had backed down on modifying enforcement of the draconian Blasphemy Law, which carries a mandatory death sentence, and which requires no more than an accusation to prompt an arrest. In spite of Musharraf's declarations, this, Kazim said, was a failure of nerve. "The mullahs are never popular with the common people," he said. "They find their patronage among kings."

When Pervez Musharraf came to power, in a hair-raising but bloodless coup in October of 1999, he was a relatively unknown figure in Pakistan. He was a *mohajir*—an Urdu-speaking refugee from India. He was married, with two children, both of whom led modern lives—a daughter married to a documentary filmmaker and a son working as an actuary in Boston. He was not thought to be a fundamentalist, and there were no corruption scandals attached to his name. For the educated middle classes, with their memories of the previous military dictatorship, led by Zia ul-Haq, this was promising, even though the military was once more in control of the country. Two days after the coup, a poll indicated that seventy-five per cent of Pakistanis supported it, apparently sharing the military's perception that they were well rid of the inept and corrupt government of the deposed Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif.



Syed Musharrafuddin—Pervez's father—was a middle-ranking Indian bureaucrat. He had three sons, the second of whom, Pervez, was born in Delhi in 1943; the family left in 1947, after the partition of India and Pakistan. Tens of thousands died in the violent exchange of populations as Muslims fled India and Sikhs and Hindus fled Pakistan. The Musharraf family was lucky; their passage was uneventful. Syed Musharrafuddin started a new career in Pakistan's foreign service, and in 1949 was posted to Turkey, where he spent seven years, and where his sons learned fluent Turkish. When the family returned to Pakistan, Pervez was sent to Karachi's top boys' school—St. Patrick's High School—and then to Forman Christian College, in Lahore. After high school, he embarked on an Army career, and that was to shape his attitudes to his country's political institutions.

A recruit in the Pakistani Army quickly learns three things: that India is bent on Pakistan's destruction, that Kashmir must be secured for Pakistan, and that civilian politicians are corrupt and untrustworthy. The Army, he is taught, embodies the country's survival, with Islam as its core identity, and guarantees order. In return, an officer enjoys a career in an institution that consumes much of the national budget, that gives access to top jobs, that runs one of Pakistan's largest industrial empires, and that sets the terms of foreign and domestic policy.

Musharraf, an athletic and outgoing cadet, entered the Pakistan Military Academy in 1961. The Army was, and still is, dominated by Punjabis, with the Pashtuns as the second most numerous group. And yet, even as a *mohajir* officer, Musharraf thrived. In 1964, when he was commissioned in the 16th Field Artillery as a second lieutenant, Pakistan had already fought India once and another war was imminent. He fought and was decorated in that war, and by the time of the next, disastrous war, in 1971, he had joined the commandos—an unusual choice for someone of his background—and had been promoted to major.

The same year, a dispute over who

was to form a government rapidly became a civil war. The Awami League, headed by Sheikh Mujib, had won the elections that year in East Pakistan and had a controlling majority in parliament; Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the Pakistan People's Party leader, won in West Pakistan. These two areas were separated by a thousand miles of Indian territory; when India invaded East Pakistan, the Pakistani Army quickly surrendered and Pakistan itself was torn apart. East Pakistan became the separate sovereign state of Bangladesh.

Like many other young officers, Musharraf took the defeat badly. An old friend from the Military Academy brought him the news. "I heard of the ceasefire and I went and told him it was all over," the friend said. "He took off his commando jacket and threw it on the floor. It was an olive-green jacket and I had always coveted it. I picked it up and kept it. He thought it a defeat. We all did."

In the aftermath, the Army, under Zia's leadership, turned to Islam in search of a renewed sense of national dignity. In Musharraf's younger Army days, religious attitudes had been relaxed. Musharraf socialized in officers' clubs that served alcohol, and he acquired a reputation as a ladies' man. His old Military Academy friend was president of the Elvis Presley Fan Club. "I taught him to dance—rock, jive, cha-cha," the friend told me. "We had our playboy fun." Musharraf, he said, loved to dress well, and after they graduated the two young men spent weekends together, riding motor scooters and living it up. After 1971, the Army became a sterner place. Zia ul-Haq began his rise to become the leader of the Army and then, with the overthrow of Bhutto, in 1977, of the nation. In a move that generated national and international revulsion, Zia had Bhutto tried and hanged for complicity in murder. Soon afterward, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and Pakistan became the front-line state of the Islamic jihad in Afghanistan. Aided by American money, Pakistan armed and trained the Islamic warriors who harried Soviet troops and eventually forced their withdrawal.

In 1980, Zia created the Federal Sharia Court, to bring Pakistan's laws into line with the mullahs' version of Islamic law. Musharraf was by now a member of the Special Services Group, a military unit that helped organize the training of Islamic fighters. He was a bit of a maverick (once, he was disciplined for leading a revolt against the poor quality of tea in the officers' mess). Nevertheless, he was picked out for promotion by the two men who were shaping the hard-line jihad policy: General Mirza Aslam Beg, who became Chief of Army Staff, and General Zia himself. Musharraf was chosen to be Zia's military secretary, but the promotion was not confirmed. If he had been in that job, he would have died on August 17, 1988, when Zia's plane crashed, killing everyone on board.

Zia's death led to a return of democracy, and Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of the former Prime Minister, triumphantly assumed power. However, she served for only a short time; she was dismissed as Prime Minister in 1990. Her successor, Nawaz Sharif, met the same fate in 1993; Bhutto was reëlected and this time served until 1996, when she was again dismissed and Sharif returned. Both had grappled with economic collapse and increasing violence. Both were accused of personal corruption. Neither made any move to tackle Zia's fundamentalist legacy.

Bhutto and Sharif did attempt to resolve Pakistan's dispute with India. Bhutto signed three agreements with her Indian counterpart, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, in 1988. In February of 1999, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Sharif in Pakistan. Sharif's efforts at a rapprochement were to bring him into direct conflict with Pervez Musharraf.

Perhaps the clearest statement of Musharraf's views on Pakistan's rivalry with India lies in a thirty-six-page thesis that he wrote in 1990. Musharraf was a brigadier general and was attending a course at the Royal College of Defence Studies, in London, along with forty-five officers of similar rank from some thirty other countries and thirty-five British officers. Musharraf was considered one of the best overseas students, and he chose as his topic the conflict between development and the arms race on the Indian subcontinent.

The paper makes depressing reading. Both countries, he wrote, are mired in

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ON PHOTOGRAPHY

PASSION FRUIT

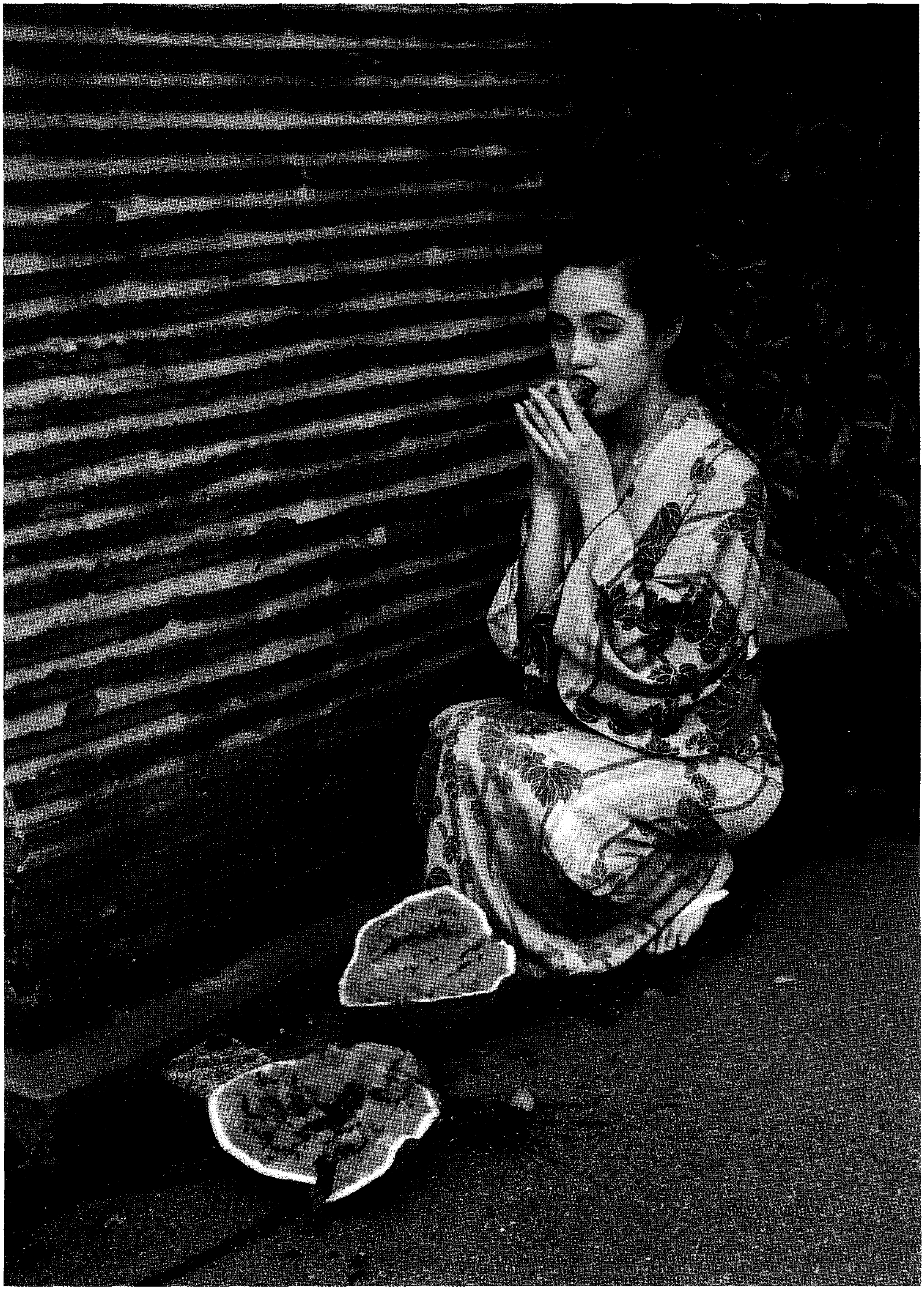
Nobuyoshi Araki's latest book presents many challenges, to local tastes, to legal standards (censorship laws forbid its publication in Japan), but most of all to shoplifters: "Araki by Araki," a collection of a thousand images taken over the past thirty years, weighs more than thirty pounds. Some readers may remember hefting another book by an erotic art-house photographer, the sixty-six-pound "Sumo," by Helmut Newton, published, like "Araki," by the German house Taschen. Others may unsheathe the silk-bound book from its bubble-gum-pink shipping case and think of *shunga*, the pornographic prints that brides of the Edo period traditionally brought to a marriage, along with the household furniture.

Araki, who was born in 1940, grew up near Tokyo's tenderloin district; almost daily, he played in a temple graveyard that served as a potter's field for courtesans. His favorite color is red. ("When the incendiaries from the American B-29s dyed Japanese skies red, I found it very beautiful," he says, in typical faux-naïf fashion.) For many years, he worked for an advertising company by day and photographed pudenda after hours. He published the photographs samizdat style, and sent them to art critics and to people chosen at random from the Tokyo phone book. It comes as no surprise that he has been in and out of trouble with the authorities throughout his career.

Over the past ten years, the lovable widower rogue has seen his reputation grow, on the strength of one-man shows in Paris, New York, and Prato, Italy. "After my wife's death, I went on taking more and more photos of women," he said, using a Japanese word that could also be translated as "leaves." "So, lots of leaves have unfolded around me, and it's been paradise."

—*Kevin Conley*

COURTESY TASCHEN

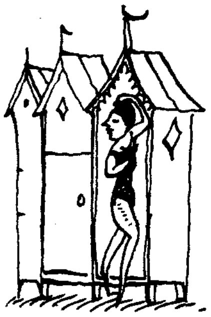


poverty and both spend far too much on arms; the cost of a modern tank could build fifty village schools. But, he argued, India's posture was offensive and Pakistan's defensive. Pakistan wants "down to earth, respectable survival," while India has the long-term goal of "achieving a dominant power status in the Indian Ocean region" and the short-term aim of "establishing hegemony over South Asia." The arms race could be reversed, therefore, only if India changed its attitude, and external powers and the United Nations insured that it did. It is clear from the thesis that Musharraf viewed any attempt to reach a bilateral agreement with suspicion. So in February of 1999, when Vajpayee arrived at the Pakistani border, attended by a surge of good will, Musharraf, then the Chief of Army Staff, refused to meet him there and only grudgingly appeared in Lahore, Vajpayee's final destination in Pakistan. Despite Musharraf's reluctance, and despite violent street protests by Islamic hardliners, the visit marked the warmest moment in relations between the two countries in years. A few weeks later, India and Pakistan again found themselves fighting, in Kargil, in Indian-held Kashmir, a sparsely populated mountain region with seventeen-thousand-foot peaks.

In the long confrontation over Kashmir, many battles have been fought on remote mountain peaks, where soldiers on both sides often succumb to hypothermia and altitude sickness. On the Pakistani side, the Army has favored the use of irregular elements—jihadis, or Islamic guerrilla fighters. (Each time the Pakistani Army has engaged directly with the larger Indian forces, Pakistan has lost.) The peaks in Kargil are on the Indian side of the Line of Control—the disputed border. But during the winter months the Indian troops withdrew. In the winter of 1999, according to the official story, local Kashmiri Muslims, moved by nothing more than patriotism, occupied the heights, despite severe conditions. Most analysts, however, believe that the operation was devised and conducted by the Pakistani Army. By the time the Indians noticed, Pakistani forces were securely dug in, occupying a position from which they could attack a strategic road.

There are good reasons to attribute the plan to the Chief of Army Staff, Musharraf. Such plans had been contemplated before; when I met former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, in London, she told me that she herself had vetoed one during her tenure, pointing out that even if it succeeded militarily it would be a diplomatic disaster. One of Musharraf's former teachers told me that he had personally rebuked Musharraf for the operation. It was, he told me, "a disaster of Musharraf's making."

The Pakistani military leaders anticipated that the clash in Kargil would bring swift international intervention that would put pressure on India to negotiate, as Musharraf had suggested in his thesis. But India responded with full military force. By early June, there was heavy fighting along nearly a hundred miles of mountain terrain as the Indian Army mounted air strikes and called in artillery to support its ground forces.



The situation was especially dangerous because, a year earlier, India and then Pakistan had carried out nuclear-weapons tests for the first time. In Washington, the Clinton Administration worried that the conflict could escalate into a nuclear exchange. Washington had no doubt that the occupation of Kargil had been a Pakistani Army operation, but neither the Administration nor Prime Minister Sharif was sure that the Army could be controlled. Sharif tried to defuse the crisis through back-channel diplomacy with

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FILMING THE FAMINE

1
My meal of pleasure crisped like a wave
in the perfect circle of his lips,
not helped by the winds and the air:

the primal garment of his skin,
and the brush-braid on the hem of his voice,
was an answer as soft as the question.

It was an evening made of cold clouds
and the necessary flight of natural sleep,
which takes the malice of memory into the half-world.

Springs that had carried the steely dusk
only hours old into my heart
lost their coral heartbeat and were still.

The island glittered like some silver and crimson
winter fruit. The river's small leaden blue
pulse was only sad as one is in a dream.

Its whistled lament took blood from cattle
and brought down birds—its scarlet cross-stitch
roped me into grudging prayer. . . .

2
The image of peace was superimposed
on a sea of composed fragments,
fairground notes like a fragile line of surf
came from the stamens of her pearly fingers,

out of the shelter of her veil,
into the shadow of her arms.
She was all stranger, like some war
that had escaped out of a book,
all but Irish, fought according
to the code of the angels.

Mass paths and other useless roads,
devastated by street battles,
and soldiers impersonating soldiers
overlapped in a film presentation
of an island that had lived through
two famines, and still comes into my dreams.

Brickmakers and coal-heavers
and people without end
slid together in a cell of false time,
a summer of sorrow,
flat lines of darker black
in the sunken inkpots
of the brig Eliza Ann,
The Intrepid, the ship Carrick,
Hebron, Erin's Queen, Syrius,
Virginius, The Sisters,
Elizabeth and Sarah.

The springing forms of her hands
were a merciless screen against sight:
but if the notes were high and opened heaven—
they might suddenly hear something.

—*Medbh McGuckian*

Vajpayee. In late June, he thought that he had reached a deal: as Sharif crossed Indian airspace on his way to visit China, Vajpayee would send him a message of good will, thus enabling him to land in Delhi on his way back. The two men would then sign an agreement to withdraw their forces and start talks. But the message from Delhi never came, and by early July the Clinton Administration feared that India would open a second front.

According to an account later published by Bruce Riedel, a senior Clinton adviser, American intelligence had reported to the President that Pakistan had prepared its nuclear arsenal for possible use. Sharif denies that he ordered this, but there was no doubt that Musharraf knew about it; and if Sharif did not order it Musharraf was the only other man with the authority to do so. South Asia was on the edge of a holocaust. Sharif was distraught, afraid that he could not rein in his own Army and fearful for his life if he pulled back without any concrete diplomatic victory. At the same time, Saudi Arabia was putting diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to withdraw, and Sharif, finally, was forced to do so.

The Kargil operation cost the lives of between thirteen hundred and seventeen hundred men and might have brought the subcontinent a nuclear exchange. But the Pakistani Army and its commander, Pervez Musharraf, did not forgive Sharif for ordering them out. In September, Sharif appealed to Washington for support, warning of a possible coup and of the dangers of Islamic fundamentalism within the Army. He sent his brother to Washington, along with General Khwaja Ziauddin, the head of Inter-Services Intelligence—the notorious I.S.I.

Musharraf told me later that the coup might never have happened if not for the events of October 12, 1999. He and his wife, Sehba, had spent the weekend in Sri Lanka attending a military function and playing golf. But that morning Musharraf learned that Sharif was planning to replace him with General Ziauddin. It would have been the second time in a year that Sharif had changed the Army leadership. In Pakistan, it was well understood that for a Prime Minister to interfere once with the Army's arrangements was reckless; to interfere twice was intolerable.

A standoff was inevitable, and it came on Musharraf's flight home from Sri Lanka: Sharif attempted to prevent the plane from landing on Pakistani soil, even as fuel began to run out. Sehba Musharraf, who had been napping, was awakened by the plane's strange movements as it approached the airport in Karachi. "When I woke up, there was complete silence in the cabin," she recalled. "The other passengers were sleeping. Pervez wasn't there, nor was the A.D.C. or the military secretary. The hostess was white as a sheet. Two anti-hijacking guards had come forward. We were gaining and losing height. I could see the lights of Karachi receding."

But Sharif's plan failed almost before it had begun. Ziauddin found the commanders equivocal at best in their reaction to it, and, within hours, troops had occupied the state television station and the Prime Minister's residence. Musharraf's plane landed, and Musharraf, dazed, with his hair rumpled, disembarked as the de-facto ruler of Pakistan. In the early morning, his first television address was broadcast. He was wearing borrowed clothes—a jacket from one man, trousers from another—to confect the military uniform in which he wanted to be seen. The speech was brief. The Army had been forced to move, he said; the situation was calm. Afterward, Sharif was convicted of hijacking and terrorism for refusing to allow Musharraf's plane to land, but the Saudi government negotiated his exile.

For the United States, among the casualties of the coup was a promise that Sharif had made: that Pakistan would coöperate in American attempts to capture Osama bin Laden, who was suspected of planning the bombings of two

American embassies in Africa, in August of 1998. Musharraf rescinded the promise. He told Clinton that it would offend Pakistan's Pashtun tribes and that they were too important to the country's national security.

During Pakistan's existence, no political party has successfully resisted military pressure. Each time the Army has seized power, it has promised to clean up corruption and to strengthen democracy. Each time, military rule has been extended. The I.S.I. has constantly meddled in and manipulated civilian politics, creating political parties, distributing large sums of money to favored candidates, and fomenting violence among rival groups. The only constraint on the Army's power is in the streets. Faced with civil discontent, the Army will back the people against any nominal authority. The idea, then, is to maintain its influence through a mixture of force, mediation, and interference in civic institutions.

Musharraf promised to be different. In his first major speech after the coup, he promised to clean up corruption and straighten out the country's institutions to prepare for a return to democracy; his words were greeted with relief and hope. When he turned to Islam, the message was equally reassuring: "Islam teaches tolerance, not hatred; universal brotherhood, not enmity; peace, and not violence."

He presented a liberal image, that of a man who privately indulges a taste for Johnnie Walker. He identified with Atatürk, the military leader who transformed the Turkey of his childhood into a secular state, and was photographed with his two Pekinese dogs, an un-Islamic—or, at least, un-fundamentalist—thing to do. He outlawed a number of paramilitary groups that had been responsible for sectarian murders and acts of terrorism. He installed military supervisors in public institutions and set up a National Accountability Bureau, which started to investigate corruption and bring the guilty to account. He even offered his own tax records for public scrutiny. For a while, it felt like a new beginning in a country that had been drifting into sectarian extremism, ungovernability, and corruption.

Abroad, however, Musharraf was still viewed as a dictator. The British government allegedly sent a private message warning him that there was to be no repeat of Zia ul-Haq's hanging of a deposed Prime Minister. Publicly, Britain halted aid, and Pakistan was suspended from the Commonwealth. The European Union postponed the signing of a new trade-and-coöperation agreement, suspended all aid and trade missions, and began an urgent debate on military and economic sanctions. The United States expressed disappointment and urged a swift return to democracy.

In Washington during the Clinton era, Musharraf was remembered as a coup-maker and the general who had launched the Kargil operation, and many Pakistani officers, in turn, resented what they saw as the United States' abandonment of Pakistan after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Nor had the United States supported Pakistan in the Kashmir dispute; America opposed Pakistan's deployment of Islamic jihadis in Kashmir, which India called cross-border terrorism (a definition that the United States, despite its gratitude after September 11th, eventually endorsed).

The fall of the Taliban brought the war against terror into Pakistan, as fleeing jihadis and their Pashtun supporters took refuge in Pakistan's tribal areas in the North-West Frontier Province and America pressured Pakistan to pursue them. From the North-West Frontier, many slipped down into the cities, using networks of associated groups and sympathizers to reorganize. That would have been bad enough, but the intricate connections between the jihadis and the I.S.I. cast doubt on Musharraf's ability to deal with the new landscape. "After September 11th," a Western observer noted, "there had been an amazing parade of international statesmen through here, getting their pictures taken with Musharraf. Now they're all coming to yell at him."

The Islamist fundamentalist groups demonstrated their power with a series of terrorist acts: an attack on the Indian Parliament in December, which brought India and Pakistan to the brink of war again, and on the Sheraton Hotel in early May. Later came an attack on the family quarters of an Indian Army barracks, which killed more than thirty people, mostly women and children, and the car bomb at the American Consulate in Karachi. The terrorist attacks were warnings to Musharraf that abandoning militants in Kashmir would have unpleasant consequences. The India-Pakistan standoff was defused only by high-profile visits from such figures as the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in January, and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, in June. On July 14th, as tensions were beginning to settle along the Line of Control, twenty-eight Hindu pilgrims, many of them women and children, were massacred in Jammu, in Kash-

"Read the card! Read the card!"

mir. The kidnapping, in January, and subsequent murder of Daniel Pearl had been another message.

One day not long after the attack on the United States Consulate in Karachi, I was driven along the main road toward Hyderabad. Some twenty miles out of Karachi, we turned off the highway onto a paved road, then, a mile farther on, onto a dirt track. In a bleak patch of desert, we pulled up beside a walled garden some fifty yards square. The large gate was opened by two sleepy policemen. Inside, rows of fruit trees obscured the far side of the garden, where a dismembered body was discovered on May 17th.

Nobody I spoke to has any doubt that this is where Daniel Pearl was killed. But none of the forensic evidence was produced at the secret trial in Hyderabad, where, on July 15th, four defendants were found guilty of kidnapping and murder—an apparent triumph for the Pakistani police and the justice system. The accused were convicted on the technical evidence of e-mails, files found on laptop computers, the gruesome video of the murder, and, in the case of the chief suspect, Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, the eyewitness testimony of a taxi-driver who said that he saw Daniel Pearl get into a car with Saeed outside a downtown restaurant the day he disappeared. (The only trouble with that piece of evidence, I was told by a man close to the prosecution case, was that it wasn't true.)

The Pakistani police force, as the government acknowledges, is not the most effective in the world. When it pursues a criminal, its habitual tactic is to arrest anyone who has anything to do with the case, together with his relatives, and hope that the man they want eventually hands himself over in return for his family's freedom. In the Pearl case, though, the United States had a direct interest, and the Pakistani police were forced to coöperate with the F.B.I. and other investigators. It was a sign, perhaps, of the importance of the case that Pakistani police broke a local taboo: usually, only the male members of a suspect's family are detained; in this case, they locked up the women as well.

It worked. On February 6th, the Pakistani police publicly identified Saeed as a prime suspect. What was not then made public (and what American investigators weren't told) was that, the day before, Saeed had turned himself over in Lahore to the home secretary of the state of Punjab, who happened to be a former top official of the I.S.I. and a connection whom Saeed clearly trusted. The announcement of Saeed's "arrest" did not come until February 12th, when Musharraf (who had referred to Daniel Pearl as an "overintrusive journalist" caught up in "intelligence games") was visiting Washington.

Saeed's trial was not all that it seemed. He confessed his involvement, but he later recanted; the prosecutors had only circumstantial evidence linking him to either the kidnapping or the murder. Even under Pakistan's justice system, circumstantial evidence is insufficient to hang a man. The taxi-driver was persuaded to supply the missing link, but that was a risky strategy as well as a dishonest one. As the trial began, prosecutors feared that the defense might be able to produce alibi evidence that would leave their shaky case in ruins. The trial was jeopardized again in May, when police were led to the body by a man called Fazal Karim, who, according to some reports, has also confessed to the kidnapping. The trial could still unravel on appeal, and Saeed could prove to be a source of embarrassment to the government. One source told me that Saeed was confident that he could strike a bargain: he would escape the death penalty in return for his silence on operations that he claimed to have carried out for the I.S.I. in India.

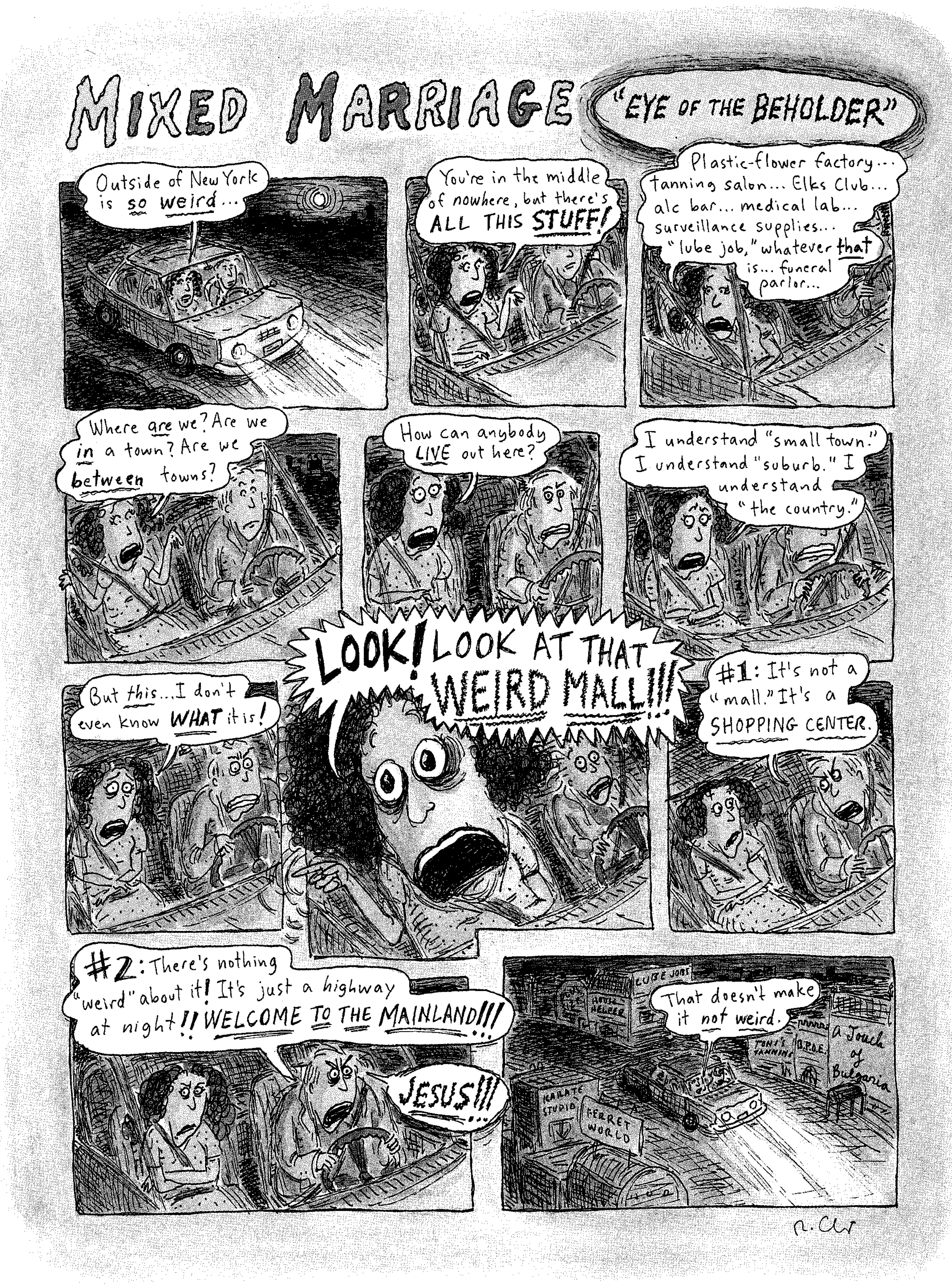
Saeed is not the only terrorist with possible I.S.I. connections who has the ability to damage Musharraf's Pakistan. Dozens of armed groups have been driven underground. Many leaders have been arrested in the past few months; others have been killed. But the power of the Islamic groups has always been in the jihadis and in the networks of killers who terrorized cities like Karachi in the eighties and nineties. For the jihadis, the war goes on.

"You'll like him," one of Musharraf's relatives told me. "He's honest, modest, and sincere. He is really doing his best for Pakistan." Few people doubted Musharraf's honesty, but I found that his sincerity and his efforts on behalf of Pakistan were no longer widely credited. "He's changed," an old friend said. "He's half the man he was. He's surrounded by sycophants and bureaucrats, and he hasn't cleaned up one per cent of the civil administration."

He's quick, people said, but he accepts what he's told too easily; an expression in Urdu describes it—"weak ears." I was told that he was impatient and did not understand the difficulties of governing Pakistan; that the military mind was not adapted to the complexities of politics. He is under orders from the Supreme Court to return Pakistan to democracy in October—orders that he says he wants to obey. But, as the date approaches, it is increasingly evident that the once reluctant coup-maker is unwilling to hand power back to the civilian politicians he despises. In trying to balance these aims, Musharraf has made a series of political mistakes that have left him looking like a military dictator of the old school.

The parliament that is elected in October will very likely be dominated by Pakistan's two most powerful parties: Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party and Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League. Neither leader is friendly toward Musharraf. If Musharraf is to have compliant civilian politicians, he has to invent them. His efforts to do that have only discredited him. The man who promised to clean up politics has once again deployed the I.S.I. to try to split the Muslim League and to construct what political commentators contemptuously call the King's Party—a new political force loyal to Musharraf. That has driven him into alliances with corrupt local leaders whom he had previously promised to bring to justice. But in last year's local elections his candidates did not do well; after October, Musharraf risks facing a hostile parliament—and a Prime Minister—who would enjoy both power and democratic legitimacy, while he would have neither.

In April, Musharraf tried to gain legitimacy through a referendum in which he asked the voters to endorse him as President for five more years. Zia ul-Haq resorted to the same device—an unappealing precedent—but Musharraf was persuaded that his case was different; when he put the idea to his Cabinet, there was only one dissenter. However, the Supreme Court, ruling on a legal challenge, decided that the referendum held no constitutional authority. Musharraf was now in the worst of positions: even if the referendum succeeded,


MIXED MARRIAGE
"EYE OF THE BEHOLDER"
Outside of New York is so weird...
You're in the middle of nowhere, but there's ALL THIS STUFF!
Plastic-flower factory... tanning salon... Elks Club... alc bar... medical lab... surveillance supplies... "lube job," whatever that is... funeral parlor...
Where are we? Are we in a town? Are we between towns?
How can anybody LIVE out here?
I understand "small town." I understand "suburb." I understand "the country."
But this... I don't even know WHAT it is!
LOOK! LOOK AT THAT WEIRD MALL!!!
#1: It's not a "mall." It's a SHOPPING CENTER.
#2: There's nothing "weird" about it! It's just a highway at night!! WELCOME TO THE MAINLAND!!!
JESUS!!!
CUBE JOBS
KARATE STUDIO
FERRET WORLD
That doesn't make it not weird.
TONI'S TANNING
B.P.O.E.
A Touch of Bulgaria

it would not legitimatize his Presidency. He campaigned throughout the country in an embarrassing range of local headgear, but on the day of the referendum the voters stayed home. Fraud was rampant. The official tally, which claimed overwhelming support for Musharraf, was greeted with derision.

The referendum was the suggestion of Lieutenant General Tanwir Naqvi, a retired armor officer whom Musharraf had appointed to head the grandly named National Reconstruction Bureau, a body that Musharraf has charged with redrafting the constitution. Increasingly, Naqvi is seen as the man assigned to help Musharraf consolidate his power, a project that is not going well.

Naqvi unveiled his constitutional proposals in July, and all were greeted with hostility. To try to keep out the old-line politicians, he recommended that only candidates with a university degree be permitted to run, an unpopular idea in a country whose government has failed spectacularly in its duty to educate its citizens. The fiercest criticism was reserved for the role of the military, which would dominate a new National Security Council—and that of the President. The amended constitution would permit the President to appoint the Prime Minister and to chair the N.S.C.; most important, the President (in consultation with the N.S.C.) would still have the power to dismiss the government and parliament. The difficulty of this democratic vision is that, for it to work after the October election, the parliament needs to approve Musharraf's new constitution and work within it. Without exception, the representatives of the political parties I spoke to thought that was ridiculous. The bulk of Pakistan's political activists are now grouped in the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy—in opposition to Pervez Musharraf.

One evening, I went to visit General Naqvi in his office, in a grandiose building that was one of the legacies of Benazir Bhutto's tenure. Built to resemble a Mogul palace, with pepper-pot turrets and wide hallways laid with gleaming marble, it seemed half deserted. The General was wearing a dark double-breasted suit. His black hair was brushed back from his forehead, and, with rimless spectacles and a dark mustache, he seemed more like a businessman than like a general.

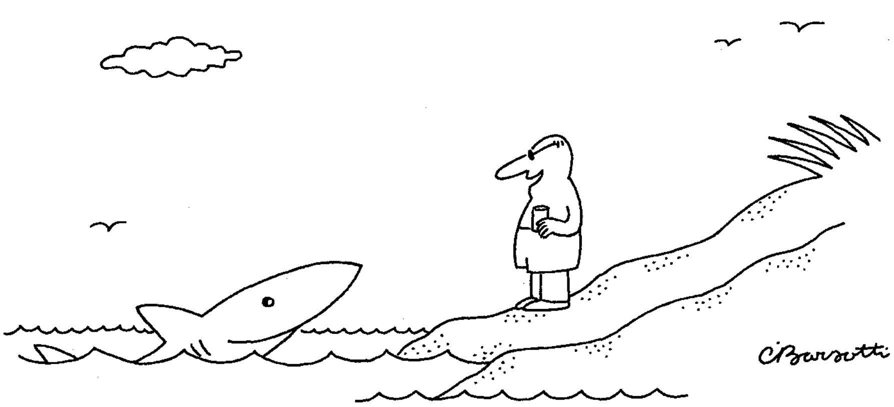
Mirza Aslam Beg, a former Chief of Army Staff, had asked me, rhetorically, why I thought a man who in his Army career had been unable to put one brick on top of the other should have been put in charge of rewriting the constitution. I asked General Naqvi the same question, in slightly more diplomatic terms. He fidgeted slightly. "It's hard to answer without sounding pompous," he said. "Let's just say that perhaps I wasn't considered the worst person who had ever worn a uniform."

As we talked in the fading light of the warm evening, it was evident that he did not understand why people objected to the new constitution; it did not trouble him that his plan gives the Army a constitutional power so complete that direct military intervention becomes redundant. "The National Security Council will bring harmony between the Prime Minister, the President, and the Chief of Army Staff," he explained. Musharraf currently holds all three posts. After the election, he will hold two. "These are the three centers of power. It's giving the Army a political role." Then, with a smile, he said, "Bringing it in to keep it out."

I met with Musharraf in Rawalpindi, the Army stronghold outside Islamabad, in a graceful colonial mansion that belongs to him as head of the Army. There are other houses that he could have occupied after the coup: the Prime Minister's official residence or the President's official residence, an imposing modern building symbolically situated next to the empty parliament building. But Musharraf is an Army man, and his emotional and political strength remains in Rawalpindi. My car stopped at a gatehouse, and I walked the last two hundred yards in front of the sentries, who snapped to attention as I passed.

I waited in a ground-floor room, talking with Major General Rashid Qureshi, the head of the Army's public-relations service, until the door opened and Musharraf walked briskly in. He was wearing a dark suit, the top two buttons of the jacket undone and the bottom one straining under his stomach. The pressures of the job and a painful shoulder had restricted his squash playing, and he was limited to jogging with a bodyguard on the grounds of the mansion, which is known as Army House. Both he and his wife are anxious about their weight. He seemed hot and uncomfortable, a man with no neck, strangling in his formal wear. He removed his jacket and began to wrestle with his tie, patches of sweat showing on the back of his shirt. The symbolism of Musharraf's dress is closely watched. When he makes important television speeches, he often wears a uniform. When he went to meet Prime Minister Vajpayee, at a summit in Agra, he wore traditional dress, as he did when he received President Clinton on a brief and tense visit in 2000. Tonight, though, he was going to a wedding and had indulged his taste for sharp suits. I knew that he had had four narrow escapes from death, and I had been told that this had left him with a sense that he was a man of destiny. He looked fairly commonplace, however, as he seated himself next to me in an upright armchair, a middle-aged man in glasses, and with touches of gray showing in his mustache and his sideburns, struggling with the double buttons of his tight collar. Above his sideburns, his hair was dyed a dark chestnut. I had been told that it was his mother, who lives with the couple and with whom Musharraf is said to breakfast most mornings, who insisted on the dye.

I asked him about the night of the coup. Once the plane landed, he said, his first concern was what to tell the nation. "It was a short speech, but such speeches are the hardest," he said. He worked on it for two hours with his generals. "I wanted to speak my heart," he said. "I had no clue what my policies were going to be or what to do for the nation. I was never interested in politicians, had never interacted with any until I was head of the Army." But at this distance, he said, he was satisfied with his performance. "You can't do one hundred per cent," he said. "But I have taken the country out of the morass that it was in. It has been two and a half years of tremendous danger—but I can say with satisfaction that my government has done well." We talked about the recent crisis and the risk of nuclear war. It had never been likely, he insisted, although as long as hostile armies stood toe to toe there was the possibility. In his view, the Kashmir dispute was linked to the fact that India had never accepted the creation of Pakistan. I pointed out that Vajpayee's visit to Lahore in 1999 had been widely read as a symbol of exactly that—a gesture of good will that the Kargil episode



"Impressed? Well, wait until I tell you about this next case."

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had ruined. Musharraf grew irritated.

"Vajpayee's visit to Lahore was not a gesture of acceptance," he said. "When Vajpayee came, it was to sideline the Kashmir dispute. It was resisted by the people of Pakistan." He went on, "I was sitting there when the draft was read. Kashmir was not mentioned. His plan was friendship at the cost of Kashmir, and Nawaz Sharif was going along with it. It was only later, on my insistence, that Kashmir was included. He didn't come for a permanent solution. Kashmir has been a festering wound until now. It's a sequence of events—you can't see it as fifty years of milk and honey. It's not that Vajpayee comes and then there was Kargil. It's not like that."

Did he regard Kargil as a success? He shifted in his seat. "Kargil was a military success," he replied. And the diplomatic effects? "Diplomatically, it highlighted Kashmir," he said. "It has been in focus ever since. That was something the jihadis achieved."

Surely, I said, it was more than the jihadis. "Well, later—more happened, yes," he said.

Musharraf was unwilling to concede that Kargil had been an official operation, or that Pakistan had sponsored the jihadis' infiltration in Kashmir. But there was no denying that recent terrorist actions in India had precipitated a military crisis. He had been forced by international pressure to try to stop movements of irregular forces across the Line of Control. He did not regret that decision, he insisted, provided that there was a response from India in the form of meaningful negotiations.

"The indigenous struggle requires no further assistance from Pakistan," he added. "The people of Kashmir won't give up. It has been our national interest since 1947, and we won't give it up. There is no policy of sending people into Kashmir through any government agency. Obviously, there are organizations that have sprung up over a decade that are totally dedicated. It is not the government that is behind all those organizations. I have given a commitment on the Line of Control on the understanding of talks. If it doesn't happen, we must keep reviewing the policy."

Musharraf would not condemn policies of the I.S.I. that had led to the cross-border crisis. "It's unfortunate that the I.S.I. is targeted around the world. It's wrong and baseless. It does what the C.I.A. does, what RAW"—India's intelligence service—"does, Mossad. It does what the government wants it to do. It is not a government within a government. The I.S.I. is manned by uniformed people. Especially when they answer to a commander-in-chief. I am the commander-in-chief."

We turned to the aftermath of September 11th. Musharraf told me that he was still unconvinced that bin Laden was the main figure in the attacks. "I didn't think it possible that Osama sitting up there in the mountains could do it," he said. "He was perhaps the sponsor, the financier, the motivating force. But those who executed it were much more modern. They knew the U.S., they knew aviation. I don't think he has the intelligence or the minute planning. The planner was someone else."

I had met many people in Pakistan who still revered Osama bin Laden as a hero of Islam. Such views, Musharraf thought, were held only by extremists, but he acknowledged that there was a growing sentiment in the Muslim world against the West. "These are political, not religious, disputes," he said. "But in every dispute Muslims are involved. I keep telling people we must address the root causes, the things that push people to the limits of desperation, to abnormal suicide acts. A sense of hopelessness, powerlessness, poverty, lack of education." He had calculated the risk of siding with the United States after September 11th. "I knew the extremists were few in number. I know the political history of Pakistan, I know they don't get votes. I know that there was no support for the Taliban. People used to shudder in case they came here. I am a religious man, but the vast majority understand that this is not true Islam. It's a backward, uneducated form. Only a few extremists support it."

When I asked if he was getting enough Western support after September 11th, he said that he had no complaints. Before that, he went on, "the West saw me as a dictator, an aberration to democracy." He seemed indignant at the memory. "They should have seen how I am governing. Is it dictatorial? Is it autocratic? As a rule, they say that a military man is a dictator, but the biggest dictator of Pakistan was Bhutto. He appointed himself chief martial-law administrator of Pakistan. I didn't impose martial law." Musharraf said he regretted that his critics didn't understand democracy. "Being elected is one thing," he said. "Governing in a democratic manner is another. If an elected government is dictatorial, it is not democracy. The West is more concerned with the farce of democracy. My government is democratic. There are no military men running the government, unless they are required for efficiency—in the Karachi electric supply, for instance. I am the only man in uniform in the government."

A well-known Karachi economist had sent me an article he had written attacking the number of generals and other military men who were serving in posts throughout the administration. He had listed almost a hundred. They did not count, Musharraf said. "They are retired, like General Naqvi at the National

Reconstruction Bureau." He turned to General Qureshi: "Can you think of any other serving generals?" General Qureshi could not. General Musharraf continued to list the democratic characteristics of his regime. "We have an independent judiciary," he said. "Everywhere you look, there is a civilian government in place. The ministries are functioning under a democratic environment. Whenever we take decisions, we develop a consensus. I hold a Cabinet meeting every Wednesday for six to eight hours."

When I suggested that the constitutional proposals had been widely criticized for giving him too much power, he grew animated. Far from increasing his powers, he insisted, he planned to shed them. "Right now, I am Chief of Army Staff, Chief Executive, and President. What is power? Power is being Chief Executive. Taking decisions, running the government, undertaking development, running the economy, finance, developing the coastal highway, education. I am making these decisions. I am going to shed that power to the Prime Minister. So what's left? I have to make sure that Pakistan is governed well. Is that unrealistic? I give him full authority. If he does not do well, I will check him." He went on, "In our political setup, if you give a free ticket to the Prime Minister the government and the Cabinet are looting and plundering. So you have to contain it. Elected governments played merry hell here."

His aim, he said, was to insure that the Army—"the most stable, well-organized body in Pakistan"—was never again called upon to intervene. But the stability he envisioned depended on the acquiescence of the government that would be in place after the October elections. Nothing I had heard since I had been in Pakistan encouraged me to think that that was likely. What happens, I asked, if Benazir Bhutto returns?

"She will go to jail," Musharraf replied.

And if her party wins the elections?

"If they win the elections, they govern," he said. "And I will insure they govern honestly."

And if the parliament refuses to approve his constitutional amendments? "We will come to those problems when we reach that bridge," he said. "There will be arrangements to insure that the reforms cannot be reversed." His referendum, he insisted, had not been a mistake—just a case of too much enthusiasm by low-level officials. "I know my popularity," he said. "The people are with me. I know there was no need to cheat."

I asked Musharraf how long he wants to remain in power. "I want to relax," he replied. "I have governed for three years and it is not a bed of roses. I would like to relax in the background with a Prime Minister governing. I would like to leave on a peak, when I am popular."

I asked if that moment had passed. "No," he replied, although he conceded that there had been bad times. "Allowing airspace and logistical support to the coalition was difficult. The world has changed since 9/11. We are facing difficulties, but I am optimistic. It is good that the difficulties and problems have erupted. They are out in the open, not festering inside. We are addressing them frontally. The nation's direction is set. There is a total national commitment. I think 9/11 brought the problems out into the open to be confronted."

He paused. General Qureshi cleared his throat. "I think, if I may say so, sir, that you have turned every difficult moment into an opportunity."

"Yes, I have," Musharraf replied. "It's true."

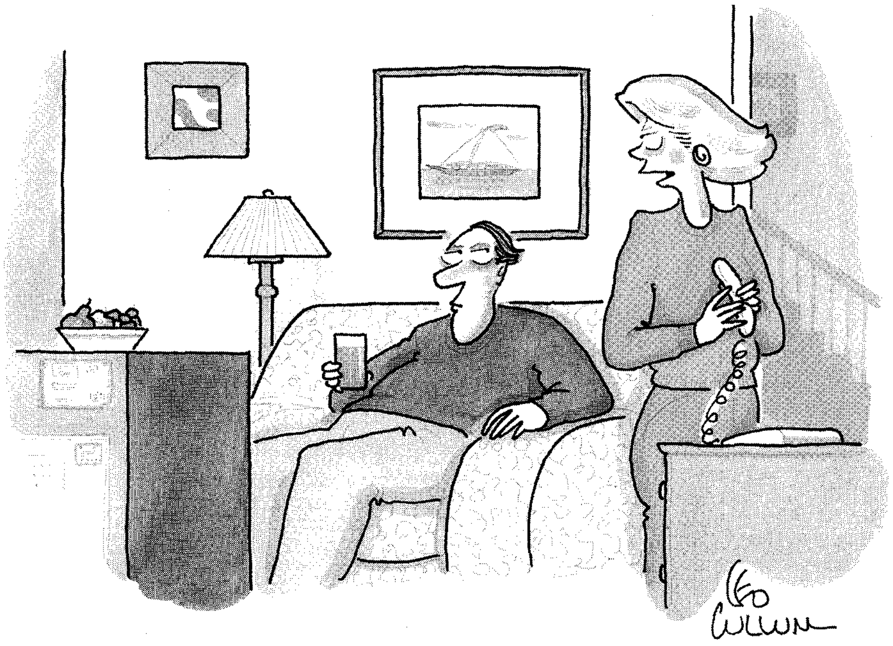
A short silence fell. I asked him, as I had asked General Naqvi, how he proposed to legitimatize his position. "We will come to that later," he said. "I am not a political man. I would not stand for election. My role is to insure that democracy is embedded in Pakistan."

Musharraf's wife, Sehba, appeared in the doorway, dressed in a gold silk shalwar kameez and gold sandals. She sat down awkwardly and toyed with a velvet brocade bag on her lap. She was ready to go to the wedding. It was 10:30 P.M. A photographer was waiting for General Musharraf, and he put on his jacket and tie and left the room for photographs.

While we waited for him to return, I talked with Sehba, and asked if she had any apprehensions about becoming Pakistan's First Lady.

"For the first three weeks, it was very bad," she said. "I went into a depression. I was upset. I was scared of having to cope with situations that I was not trained for. He rises above it. He doesn't believe in having these emotions. It has been an extraordinary roller coaster, but Pervez doesn't worry about making decisions. He has a marvellous sense of humor. He enjoys company. He's very gregarious. He organizes games at children's parties. He likes going out."

Sehba Musharraf stopped and looked anxiously toward the door. Her husband strode back into the room with his slightly bouncy, impatient walk. As he said goodbye, he saluted lightly. Then the couple left, a little stiff in their finery. In the darkness, a series of black Mercedeses were waiting. There were, I had heard, always decoy cars, just in case. ♦



"It's your tallyman. He's tallied your bananas."

U.S. JOURNAL

THE GANG'S ALL HERE

What can tens of thousands of bikers do to one small town?

BY MARK SINGER

HOLLISTER, CALIFORNIA

Without prejudice, I passed up the chance last month to buy a five-dollar copy of a panoramic photograph inscribed "Northern California Gypsy Tour, Bolado Park, Hollister, California, 1937." It depicted three hundred or so peaceable-looking citizens (motorcyclists, most of them minus their machines), plus several children—a clean-cut bunch, lounging on the grass, attired as if about to head off for some tennis. A charming enough artifact, I thought, but not one that offered any insight into what makes the present-day Hollister economy go ka-boom every Fourth of July weekend, when between eighty thousand and a hundred thousand bikers and gawkers descend upon the place.

Ten years after that photograph was taken, a far more memorable and consequential portrait was snapped, this time on San Benito Street, Hollister's main drag, in front of Johnny's Bar & Grill. That photograph is still the centerpiece of the behind-the-counter décor at Johnny's, framed along with the cover logo from the July 21, 1947, issue of *Life*, in which it was first published. It shows a heavyset fellow in a motoring cap, khakis, and leather boots straddling a motorcycle while clutching a beer bottle, with several empties lying in the foreground. A headline and subhead say, "CYCLISTS' HOLIDAY: HE AND FRIENDS TERRORIZE A TOWN," and a one-paragraph caption describes a Fourth of July debauch—how "4,000 members of a motorcycle club roared into Hollister . . . quickly tired of ordinary motorcycle thrills and turned to more exciting stunts." Traffic laws were flouted, vehicles were "rammed into restaurants and bars, breaking furniture and mirrors. . . . Police arrested many for drunkenness and indecent exposure but could not restore order."

No one in Hollister today minds—nor, it seems, did anyone protest in 1947—that this journalistic account was based upon a mostly fictitious premise. What actually materialized that Fourth of July was the equivalent of a couple of frat parties on steroids—an unseemly exhibition of drunken, uncouth behavior, perpetrated by a gathering of out-of-town motorcyclists who temporarily had the constabularies overmatched but who in the end paid their traffic fines and did their brief time in the pokey. The celebrated photograph was staged the day after the noise subsided. Instead of a terrorist invader, the loutish-looking beer guzzler was a photographer's prop—a poseur in a tableau that was lifelike up to a point, but above all *Life*-like, and basically bogus. Nevertheless, the episode proved, in the long run, to be extremely good for business.

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The local establishment proudly proclaims Hollister "the birthplace of the American biker,'

In 1996, a year shy of the fiftieth anniversary of the *Life* photograph and whatever had led up to it, some biker-friendly Hollister boosters began envisioning the first Hollister Independence Rally. "A group got together and approached the city," Ellen Brown, the current executive director of the rally, told me. "But the city-government people were not holding their arms open. They didn't want a reënactment of 1947, as they understood it. They weren't looking forward to raping and pillaging." The group persevered, however, and the necessary permits were granted. Though many businesses boarded up for the weekend, the 1997 event proceeded without serious complications. "By the third year," Brown said, "we had won most people over."

Nowadays, the local establishment proudly proclaims Hollister "the birthplace of the American biker," mindful, no doubt, that the image commonly evoked by the term "American biker" is not the weekend hobbyist—the Orange County accountant or the San Fernando Valley dermatologist who gets his jollies riding his Harley-Davidson Road King to the golf course—but the hairy prole in greasy Levi's, the lineal descendant of the cowboy who has skipped several consecutive Saturday-night baths, the creature who would just as soon dismantle a small California town as overhaul an engine. Which is to say that Hollister has deliberately embraced a cliché whose provenance can be traced to Marlon Brando's performance as the alienated antihero of Stanley Kramer's 1954 movie "The Wild One." For some reason, most bikers have been willing to overlook that "The Wild One," in addition to being the first biker picture, was the first laughably awful biker picture. Hollister, in particular, has a proprietary fondness for the movie, a fondness rooted in the fact that "The Wild One" was Hollywood's lame imagining of Hollister's mythical invasion of 1947.

Motorcyclists have been gravitating to Hollister (population thirty-five thousand, seat of San Benito County) at least since the nineteen-twenties, attracted by an oval dirt racetrack near downtown as well as by hills that offer ideal terrain for climbing competitions. Until the Hollister Independence Rally came along, the local economy was mainly dependent upon agriculture (apricots, cherries, apples, lettuce, peppers, onions), although the southern outskirts of Silicon Valley are within commuting distance. I arrived in Hollister a couple of days before the crowds gathered for this year's proceedings, and my first stop was the rally headquarters. As I chatted with Ellen Brown, a friendly, efficient woman in her early forties, a caller delivered the news that a banner that had been strung between utility poles on San Benito Street was welcoming visitors to, oops, the 2001 instead of the 2002 rally. "It's hard to find good free help," Brown said. "But if that's the biggest problem we have this week, we're doing pretty well." This was a not very oblique reference to the very real apprehension that this year something truly frightful might happen in Hollister.

Last April, during a motorcycle rally in Laughlin, Nevada, an early-morning gun battle and knife fight inside a casino left three people dead and a dozen wounded. Hours later and eighty miles away, on the shoulder of an interstate highway in California, police discovered the corpse of a biker with several bullet holes in his back. Three of the dead belonged to the Hell's Angels and the fourth was a member of the Mongols, a motorcycle clan that has grown rapidly in Southern California in recent years, largely by recruiting new members from

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mindful, no doubt, that the image evoked by the term "American biker" is not the weekend hobbyist. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

THE END IS NIGHISH
MANKOFF

Hispanic street gangs. A contingent of Hell's Angels were staying at the same hotel as the Mongols, and the result was the bloodiest installment yet in a feud provoked by the Mongols' attempts to expand into the Angels' traditional territory, in Northern California.

Law-enforcement people who specialize in monitoring biker bad behavior said that they weren't surprised by the lethal jousting in Laughlin. Part of it was explainable in terms of a demographic shift: many of the older Angels are, well, old—Sonny Barger, for decades the Angels' equivalent of a *capo di tutti capi*, is now in his mid-sixties—and, until relatively recently, most local chapters haven't pushed aggressively to rejuvenate their ranks. Because the Fourth of July spectacle in Hollister was the next major event on the West Coast motorcycle-rally calendar, and because the Hell's Angels have always made a conspicuous showing there, speculation immediately turned to whether the Mongols would come around for more action. As it happened, a couple of deputies from the San Benito County Sheriff's Department had been inside the casino in Laughlin, on an intelligence-gathering mission, but had gone to bed about an hour before they would have had to duck for cover. In the aftermath, Curtis Hill, the sheriff, told the San Jose *Mercury News*, "It's flat-out war. It will be interesting to see how many people die between now and when they call a peace to this thing."

When I left the rally headquarters and stopped by Sheriff Hill's office, he wasn't in, but his second-in-command, Lieutenant Mike Covell, was doing a fine job serving up meaty sound bites. "If there is violence, what's the nature of it going to be?" he said. "Is it gonna be knives, ball-peen hammers, guns? In Canada, they use rocket launchers."

The Hollister Police Department had enlisted forty extra cops for the weekend, and the F.B.I., the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, and four separate California state law-enforcement agencies would be represented, in uniform and undercover. A sizable contingent of media folk were also standing by, ready to wring their hands in the event of bloodshed. I deeply empathized with the anxieties of my fellow Fourth Estaters, who, I suspected, feared an anticlimax even more than they did an outburst of fresh violence.

When I mentioned to one of my teen-age sons that I would be attending a big motorcycle rally, he pleaded, "Dad, promise me that if you're going to be hanging with the Hell's Angels you won't be wearing your usual polo shirt and chinos." He had a point, but, knowing that I'd be cruising into town behind the wheel of a Chevy Malibu or an Oldsmobile Alero from Avis, I couldn't see the advantage of investing in a leather vest, chaps, boots, gloves, skullcap, and three-hundred-dollar sunglasses. So most days in Hollister I wore Levi's, sandals, and a commemorative T-shirt from the Dan Quayle Center and Museum. (Bikers tend to lean politically to the right.) I calculated that after I had been sufficiently exposed to ninety-degree heat and the shirt had accumulated stains from deep-fried cuisine, it would get sufficiently gamy to enhance my street credibility. Another option—riding, say, a Harley Fat Boy with custom stretch handlebars, chrome Thunderstar wheels, shotgun exhaust pipes, and bullet-hole decals on the gas tank—wasn't really an option. For one thing, I don't have a motorcycle license. And one reason I don't is that the only time in my life I attempted to operate a two-wheeled motorized vehicle—a Vespa, slightly larger than a child's stroller—I was less than five seconds into a test drive, wearing shorts, when I crashed into two parked cars, an experience I relive every time I admire the conversation-piece scar on my right thigh. Anyway, I'd have no time for carefree recreation. I had a job to do: scoping out one-per-centers and urging them to share their thoughts and feelings.

The term "one-per-center" derives from the American Motorcycle Association's defensive claim, during the nineteen-fifties, that only one per cent of the bikes on the road belonged to criminally inclined social misfits. The Hell's Angels and many other motorcycle clubs embraced the designation as a badge of pride—literally, by sewing "1%" patches on their vests. Sergeant Mike Rodrigues, of the San Benito County Sheriff's Department, told me to assume that all the one-per-centers who made appearances in Hollister—he mentioned the Red Devils, Hellbent, Molochs, Ghost Mountain Riders, Ancient Iron, Devil Dolls, Tophatters, Lonesome Fugitives, Solo Angels, Vagos, and Skeleton Crew motorcycle clubs—were allied with the twelve Hell's Angels chapters on hand. (Rodrigues also said that there was a lone Mongol living in Hollister, and a Mongol chapter with at least eighteen members in San Jose, less than an hour away. Conventional wisdom held that any Mongols who dared to show up wouldn't be dumb enough to wear their colors.)

A hundred and fifty or so non-one-per-center clubs were represented, in varying numbers, and it didn't take long for all of them to blend together in my eyes and brainpan, like very, very loud wallpaper. Biker fashion, male and female, never mind age or club or gang-color distinctions, has such a narrow range of permutations—leather, metal, wraparound shades, bandannas or skullcaps, German-infantry-style helmets, Harley-Davidson logos, tattoos—that from half a block away an aggregation of bikers milling on the street, self-consciously checking each other out, looks no less like a unified army than a regiment of uniformed soldiers does. Up close, virtually every bike, proudly polished to an impeccable gleam, struck me as beautiful, especially when parked. But even then there were so many to see that it was almost impossible to focus. Some ninety per cent were Harley-Davidsons; the rest were Indians, BMWs, BMC Choppers, Yamahas, Suzukis, American Iron Horses, and a miscellany of customized hybrids. More than a hundred and fifty venders had rented booths, from which they were flogging every conceivable sort of motorcycle accessory and personal gear, along with such optional merchandise as leather thongs, toe rings, Pig Snot Biker Wax, insulated bodysuits, knives, tank tops ("These Tits Are Real"), legal services, and in-your-face helmet and gas-tank stickers ("I Had a Wife Once but Her Husband Came and Got Her"; "Unless You Are Totally Nude Don't Lean on This Bike"; "The Beatings Will Continue Until Morale Improves"; "You're the Reason Our Kids Are Ugly"). The average rider had twenty-five thousand dollars invested in his or her machine. The ambience was nothing if not aspirational. For the right price, presumably, everything in town was for sale, which raised—or perhaps rendered moot—the metaphysical question of who (or what) was the genuine article and who was a wanna-be.

On San Benito Street one afternoon, before the festivities hit full stride, I came across a bunch of credibly menacing-looking dudes hanging out in front of Johnny's Bar & Grill. These were members of the Boozefighters Motorcycle Club, the crew who, according to legend, caused all the ruckus in 1947. The Boozefighters regard Johnny's as hallowed ground for its historical significance and because the ashes of Wino Willie Forkner, one of the founding members, who died in 1997, six days before the inaugural Hollister Independence Rally, are displayed inside.

I had a cordial conversation with Carl (Big Daddy) Spotts, who owns a motorcycle-repair shop near Lake Tahoe. Spotts was tall and hefty, with a flowing gray beard, and he wore a leather vest, jeans, a wide belt with an oval Boozefighters buckle, and a green cap that identified him as the club's West Coast national representative. "I also belong to the Elks," he said, pointing to a membership pin on the cap. "And the Moose." He had a flaming-wheel tattoo on his right biceps and, on his left, a Boozefighters logo that was a work in progress. "That's a coverup," he said. "Originally, I had a skunk put on there when I was fifteen."

The standard Boozefighters regalia also included a vest patch that said "GB."

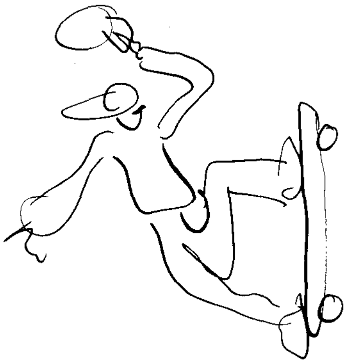
"There's disagreement as to what the 'GB' stands for," Spotts told me, "whether it's 'gag box' or 'gag bucket.' Either you had to bring a joke to each meeting or you partied till you puked."

I asked why they had come to Hollister in advance of the main event.

"It gets pretty rough," Spotts said. "You can hardly walk into the bar, it's so crowded."

He continued, "Some of our original forefathers are here tonight and tomorrow, so we came to party with them. There'll be about fifty or a hundred of us. Then we plan to drive up north of San Francisco about a hundred miles to visit Wino Willie's widow."

Three self-anointed Boozefighters had come from Norway, provoking an internecine debate about their legitimacy. "We're working on that," Spotts said. "They just have to join the national. Norway's a long ways from here. We'll straighten it out. They're good guys. We just can't afford to have guys who aren't Boozefighters running around with our badge on. If they get in trouble, it reflects on us. We try to keep our image clean."



A passing Harley Electra Glide backfired loudly, and Spotts clutched his chest. "I'm on heart medication already," he said. "I don't need that."

Later, I wondered what nutritional advice Spotts might have received from his doctors, given that the staples of a rally diet are corn dogs, nachos, funnel cakes, Polish sausages, onion rings, and beer. That, at any rate, was what sustained me as I waited for a bloody biker battle to break out. In the absence of hand-to-hand combat, I decided that the prudent journalistic strategy was to studiously witness, and thus be in a position to capitalize on the dramatic potential of, the tattoo contest, the beauty pageant, the arm-wrestling tournament, and the "bike games," which would feature such tests of skill as the weenie bite—in which teams made up of a male biker and his female rider pass through a wood-frame portal from which a thickly mustarded hot dog dangles vertically, at eye level, on a string. (Big trophy to whoever—no hands allowed—snatches the biggest bite with her teeth.) "At other rallies, they have outhouse races, where the gal sits on the can, which is on skids, while her partner pulls her with his bike," Ellen Brown told me. "But we don't go in for that sort of thing. No wet-T-shirt contests, either. We favor family-oriented competitions."

At four in the afternoon on the Fourth of July, ten adventurous women and a modest crowd of witnesses and moral supporters gathered at Hollister's only bowling alley for a preliminary round of the Hollister Independence Rally pageant. Similar sessions had been held a few weeks earlier in two neighboring towns, yielding six finalists, and Niessa Bauder-Guaracha, a clothing designer, who had volunteered to be the pageant coördinator, was hoping to come up with four more. The proceedings were late getting started, so I went outside and surveyed the venders in the bowling-alley parking lot. In one booth, a guy in his thirties, with straw-colored hair and a handlebar mustache, accompanied by his eleven-year-old son, an up-and-comer who wore Oakley shades and a camouflage bandanna, was trying to decide which sew-on American flag to display on the back of his black leather vest. He was tempted to buy one that included the message "Try Burnin' This One . . . Asshole!"

"You definitely want the 'asshole' on there," the vender said.

"You're right. Matter of fact, make that a double 'asshole!' "

Back inside, the pageant candidates, who had been instructed to wear biker gear, were lining up to pose with a Harley-Davidson Softail Springer that was doing double duty: it was also the first prize in a raffle. "Biker gear" evidently was a synonym for "not very much." Bauder-Guaracha had told me that the judges would evaluate physical appearance, personality and poise, and marketability. It took me no time to spot a potential winner. She had long straight brunet hair and long blue fingernails, and she wore a leather unitard cut so that it gave maximum exposure to her long, tanned, fat-free legs. She also wore lace-up black vinyl-and-leather boots with three-inch platform soles and stiletto heels, and amber-tinted wraparounds. Her name, I sensed, was also Amber, but in fact it turned out to be Melissa Crowley.

"You seemed so relaxed posing on that bike," I told her. "What kind of motorcycle do you ride?"

"I'm not a biker," she said. "What's holding me back? I need a bike. Or somebody to drive it, maybe."

Before I had a chance to reconsider my deep misgivings about riding a hog, Melissa introduced me to her husband, Ryan, who explained that he'd never owned one himself, because his father, back in Boston, was a nurse who warned him, "Before you get a motorcycle, you've got to come to the hospital and see all the guys in traction." Melissa and Ryan, who were in their early thirties, had moved to California five years earlier; he worked in advertising, she was an assistant manager at a health club, and she'd entered the pageant more or less for the hell of it. The prize money—a thousand dollars for first place, and merchandise prizes to the first two runners-up—wasn't really on their minds, even though Ryan did mention, in passing, his mortgage. "I told Melissa two weeks ago, 'If you're gonna take this seriously, you're not doing it,' " he said. "First place will go to some twenty-one-year-old. Second will go to the niece of someone on the committee. The best we can do is third."

It soon became apparent that Melissa would indeed be advancing. An official came over and handed her four patches bearing the logos of Miller Lite and Harley-Davidson, along with instructions to display them on her bathing suit. "I don't know how that's going to work," Ryan said. "There's more material there than there is on your bikini."

I was accurately forewarned that the crowd would peak on Saturday, and I had to park my car half a mile from the center of the action. This inconvenience generated an immediate dividend: as I walked past the headquarters of the San Benito County Sheriff's Department, Sheriff Hill happened to be standing out front. I introduced myself and he invited me inside. "We arrested five Hell's Angels last night," he said, as we sat in his office. "Two on illegal-weapons charges—a knife and a loaded revolver. Another guy was flanking the cops while they were dealing with the first two guys, they told him to back off and he didn't, so he was arrested, too.

"Today, I'm hearing information that this is the day when something's supposed to happen—all completely unsubstantiated, but I've got a number of people chasing that down. And you've got these one-per-centers out there surveilling and countersurveilling each other. That creates a tremendous amount of tension. The Angels are barely paying attention to the police, because we're not the big threat. They're actively looking for something downtown. You see that look. There's all this posturing. It's a big dance being choreographed by all the one-per-centers."

Half an hour later, on San Benito Street, caught in a crowd that reminded me of Rockefeller Center during Christmas-tree-gazing time, I met three Angels from Merced, California. They seemed to be staring intently at the passing parade, so I decided to test Sheriff Hill's theory that they were doing surveillance. "I see you guys looking around," I said. "What are you looking for?"

"What are we lookin' at? Just lookin'."

"Looking for pussy. Check it out. This is the time of year to look, when they're not wearing much."

Around the corner, milling next to a booth that the Daly City chapter had rented for the weekend, was a contingent of about forty Angels—Budweiser-drinking, bear-hugging, N.F.L.-linebacker-size specimens. The Sonoma County chapter president wore what looked like clean, pressed Levi's, but there was no one whom I felt eager to introduce to my mother or to interrogate about the status of the war with the Mongols.

A block away, at the booth operated by the Devil Dolls Motorcycle Club—adjacent to one stocked with Sonny Barger trademark merchandise—a woman named Mickey was pushing Devil Dolls pinup calendars. Barger was in town to promote his most recent book, "Ridin' High, Livin' Free," Mickey said, and I could probably find him at the factory showroom of Corbin, a manufacturer of motorcycle seats and accessories. She called him on her cell phone, and he agreed to speak with me.

It took me fifteen minutes to get there, for an interview that lasted about ninety seconds. Barger, who made his name in Oakland but now lives near Phoenix, was seated behind a table piled with books, accompanied by comrades from the Cave Creek, Arizona, chapter. Before we got started, his cell phone rang and whoever was calling immediately irritated him. "I'll tell you why we've got a problem," he was saying. "Because you keep fucking with me. And if you don't stop fucking with me it's gonna be a bigger problem." For someone whose speech was impeded by a hole in his throat—he lost his vocal cords to cancer twenty years ago—Barger articulated quite well. I wanted to discuss the Mongols, of course, and thought I'd ease into it by explaining that I felt that the media's general approach to the subject had been . . . I was going to say "hysterical," but he beat me to the punch with "like vultures." I mentioned that I already owned a copy of "Ridin' High, Livin' Free" and was sorry that I'd left it in my hotel room. But it was too late; gravity had taken hold.

"I can see where you're coming from," Barger said. "The interview's over." His Cave Creek colleagues rose from their chairs to emphasize the point.

Recalling the closing pages of Hunter

Thompson's classic "Hell's Angels"—specifically, the scene in which the hardworking journalist is suddenly set upon, severely beaten, and stomped—I figured why push it. Besides, I'd already had a brush with possible bodily harm that morning, during breakfast in my hotel. I had approached the coffee urn at the same moment as a burly, gray-bearded biker with a long ponytail. "Go ahead," I said, deferentially.

"Goathead!" he said. "Why you callin' me Goathead?"

"No. I said, 'Go ahead.' "

"I thought I heard 'Goathead.' "

"Believe me, I wouldn't call you Goathead," I assured him. Then, when his back was turned, I heard myself whisper, "But somebody else might."

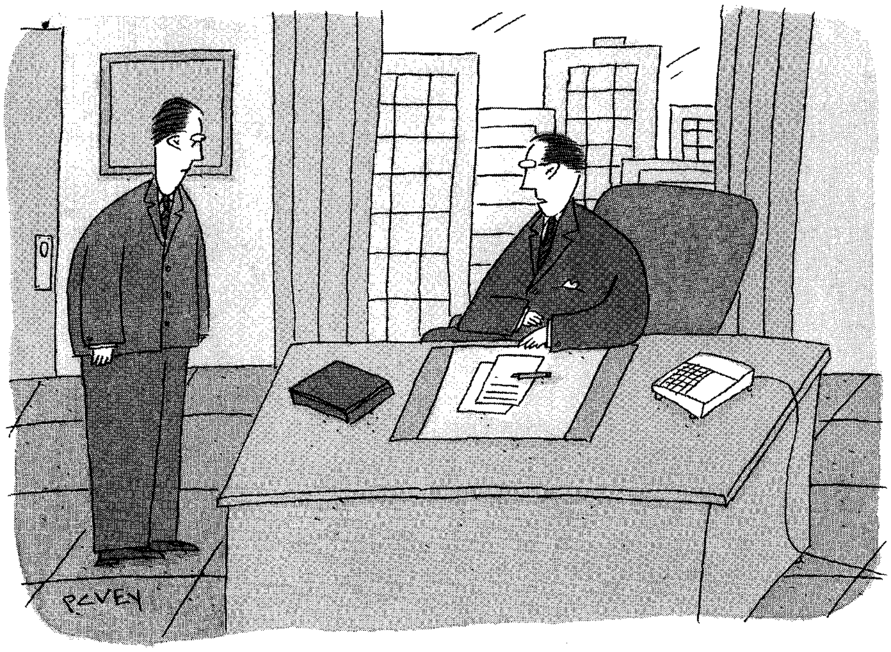
My printed schedule promised a Sunday-morning service at the Hollister United Methodist Church, led by members of the evangelical Christian Motorcycle Association. Walking to the church, I heard birds chirping in the magnolias, an experience that hadn't been available for days. I wandered past the spot where, the day before, I'd witnessed the large gathering of Hell's Angels, and saw that during the night they had dismantled their booth. Wisely, the Mongols had been no-shows, and it now seemed clear that the threat of violence, however real it had been, had passed.

As the day progressed, I experienced an odd sensation of community (not to be mistaken for a sense of belonging). I'd hung around long enough for certain faces to become familiar, certain vectors to intersect. In church, I recognized Bobby Bible (né Robert Engel, a.k.a. Bobby Biblestein), a refinery worker from Los Angeles whom I'd seen a couple of days earlier, at the tattoo contest, where he was showing off a crucifix on his chest. After the service, I discovered that we had had comparable face time with Sonny Barger. Bible had been in Laughlin and had run across Barger a few hours before the shoot-out.

"I saw him at the Flamingo Hotel," he said. "Sonny was signing books. So I felt led by the Holy Spirit to go up to him. I leaned over the table, looked him right in the eye. I said, 'Sonny, I'm gonna ask you one question. Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your personal savior?' He said, 'No, I don't.' Not angrily, just matter-of-factly. I said, 'Sonny, you know, you're gonna go to Hell when you die. O.K.?' He looked back at me with that biker look, that get-out-of-my-face-you're-pissing-me-off look. So I picked up on that right away. All of his buddies were standing there. And I exited left."

The previous afternoon, at the Hollister Independence Rally pageant finals, caught in a crush of several hundred hooting and hollering guys (and a much smaller number of gals, none of whom appeared to be exercising absolute free will), I found myself standing next to Dallas Roberts, from San Diego. I'd also met Roberts at the tattoo contest, where he won first prize in the "flaming" category. He had red hair under a red bandanna, a sunburned face, and a few days of stubble, and he wore a T-shirt promoting a microbrew called Arrogant Bastard Ale, which he'd got Sonny Barger to autograph during a visit to the Corbin showroom. The pageant itself was a repudiation of my powers of prognostication; Melissa Crowley finished out of the money. The winner, as Ryan Crowley had predicted, was a twenty-one-year-old blond surfer-girl type named Tara Rice. During Tara's first stroll down the runway, I realized I'd seen her several times already—at the California Glamour Girls booth, where, for nine or twelve or fifteen dollars a pop, anyone could pose for a Polaroid portrait with one or two or three young women wearing blossom-print pink bikinis and fixed smiles.

I even had a return engagement of sorts with Goathead. I didn't feel like sticking around for all the bike games, but I did catch the weenie bite, where the winners were an oddly matched couple named Sandy Williams and Russ Wood. Sandy was a slender grandmother who told me she'd already started training her two-year-old granddaughter for the weenie bite. Russ, who was about the size of a telephone booth, had such masterly control of his Harley-Davidson Softail that this was his and Sandy's fourth weenie-bite first place in the past three years, one of forty trophies that they'd collected over all. Clearly, justice had been served—though not the weenies themselves; those got spit out—and I knew that it was time to rev up my Chevy Malibu and bid Hollister farewell. I drove out of town, rolling past the apricot and apple orchards for a couple of miles, until I came to a stop sign at an intersection. Four motorcyclists pulled up next to me, and the leader of the pack, hulking over his Harley Dyna Low Rider, was Goathead himself. I thought about giving him a fellow-biker's wave, but that wouldn't have been appropriate. I also considered giving him the finger, just to keep things interesting. But I nodded and smiled instead, and, gratifyingly, Goathead did the same. Then we both headed west, into the sunset, or some other destination. ♦



"I'd like you to head up the new team of the recently let go."

FICTION

WHERE WERE WE

BY DAVE EGGERS

BRUNO BARBEY/MAGNUM

The light was screaming through the windows, and I opened my portal's eyelid a quick few inches and we were coming at Africa at three hundred m.p.h. The neat shadow of the plane swept over Dakar's shoreline, the city's buildings glowing in tan and white and standing still as the water and wind came to them with all the world's fury—and then died. We were somewhere else. What were we doing here? We had no idea. Hand was awake.

"Senegal," I said.

"Senegal," Hand said.

We had pictured Senegal green, but this was tan.

"West Africa, I guess, is tan," he said. "I really figured on green for Senegal."

There was no gangway to the terminal, just a stairway to the tarmac. The air was warm and the wind was warm; the sky was clear, blue but bleached, and the sun hung still, bored and unchallenged. The baggage handlers, with green knee pads, watched us through their goggles, hands resting on their heads.

"We're in Africa," Hand said.

We stepped into the airport.

"This is an African airport," he said.

It was tiny, and open everywhere. It looked like a mini-mall. We sat on the cool linoleum floor and filled out our customs forms.

"I can't believe I got to Africa," Hand said. I'd known Hand since I was seven. I'd never been further than Nevada; he'd been as far as Toronto.

"I know," I said.

"How did we get to Africa?" he said. "Already I don't want to leave. Did you feel that air? It's different. It's African air. It's like mixed with the sun more. Like our air isn't mixed as well with the sun. Here they mix it perfectly. The sun's in the wind, the sun's in your breath."

"I'm glad you could come," I said.

We passed customs and the cabbies didn't touch us, because we had no bags. A large woman in brilliant yellow appeared and asked us something.

"What?" we said.

"Wheech 'otel?"

"The Independent," Hand said, cribbing it from a backlighted ad above us.

"I take you," she said, pointing to a small bus out front. We asked her if we could get some money first. "Fine," she said, with an annoyed look at her watch. We were hers already, her children, and we were holding her up.

We cashed two thousand dollars in traveller's checks—swoop! swik! swoop!—and stopped in the bathroom to hide it. I gave half to Hand, who split it five times and found pockets for each portion. I buried stacks in pockets, in my backpack, in my socks.

We were the only passengers in the bus. The landscape on the way in to the city was dry and dusty, the color of stripped pine. Billboards featured Senegalese citizens frowning upon littering and public urination, and encouraged the drinking of milk.

When the minibus stopped at a light, our open windows filled up with faces, mothers with babies pointing into their infants' tiny mouths.

"Bebbe! Bebbe!" they yelled. The babies were swarmed by flies. Boys hawked candy and mobile phones. Everything was too fast. We weren't ready.

"Give 'em something!" Hand yelled.

"You!"

"You!"

We had money and wanted to give it to them but everything had been too sudden, and I was preoccupied by the traffic, the babies were too close—and so I managed only to smile apologetically, like a locksmith who'd failed to open a door. I moved away from the window.

"Bebbe! Bebbe!"

"Meester! Meester!"

The shuttle woman was watching us struggle. Why wasn't she telling us not to give them money? I smiled more, flustered. Hand was looking flustered, too, though he was still only half awake and his bed head was ridiculous, but finally the shuttle lurched forward. A gold sedan slipped in front of us, its driver on the phone and gesturing with fists. Soon the road was narrow and wound through the city. Men carried bike tires or sold meat from carts, while others hoisted sacks of oranges into passing cars. No one was sweating, and no one was smoking. Outside a gated compound, a tousled-haired white tourist in an enormous Fubu football jersey was talking to two uniformed men with assault rifles while a group of students from Italy—Hand was sure it was Italy—in crisp white tops and black pants and skirts lightly dusted, whinnied by on mopeds. All of Dakar's residents, it seemed, were selling objects, or moving them from one location to another—a city of small favors and short errands.

We'd called the airlines that offered round-the-world tickets. The tickets allowed unrestricted flying in one direction. You usually have twelve months to go around the globe, but we'd do it in a week. The tickets cost three thousand dollars each, a number out of the reach of people like us under normal circumstances, but I had got some money about a year before, in a windfall kind of way, and had been both grateful and constantly confused by it. And now I wanted to get rid of it, or most of it, and I believed this purging would provide clarity, and that doing it in a quick global flurry would make it—well, I actually don't know why Hand and I combined these two ideas. We just figured we would go all the way around, once, in a week, starting in Chicago, ideally hitting Saskatchewan first, then Mongolia, then Siberia, then Yemen, then Rwanda, then Madagascar—maybe those last two switched around—then Greenland, then home.

"This'll be good," said Hand.

"It will," I said.

"How much are we getting rid of again?"

"I think thirty-eight thousand."

"Is that including the tickets?"

"Yeah."

"So we're actually giving away what—thirty-two thousand dollars?"

"Something like that," I said.

"How are you going to bring it? Cash?"

"Traveller's checks."

"And then we give it to who?"

"I don't know yet. I think it'll be obvious when we get there."

We could easily make our way around the world in a week, with maybe five stops along the way—the hours elapsed would in part be voided by the crossing of time zones. We would oppose the turning of the planet and refuse the setting of the sun.

The itinerary changed on each of the days we had to decide, on the phone, with me in Chicago consulting a laminated pocket atlas and Hand in St. Louis with his globe, a huge thing, the size of a beach ball, which spun wildly between poles—he'd bumped into it one late night, and it was no longer smooth.

We called an airline representative. She thought we were assholes. If we wanted to get around the world in a week, she said, we'd be in the air ninety-five per cent of the trip.

We decided to skip the pre-planned round-the-world tickets. We'd start in Mongolia and just go from there. We'd get there and then just hit the airports when we were ready to leave. The new plan felt good. It was more in keeping with the over-all idea, anyway—that of unmitigated movement, of serving any impulse. It couldn't cost all that much more, we figured. How much could it cost? We had no idea. All we wanted was to get around the world in a week—with half a day in Franz Josef Land at least.

The hotel, in the left-middle of Dakar, was dark inside, the lobby low and sleek and smooth with black marble, all of it cool, safe, immaculate. The reception man laughed at Hand's French and gave us his English. We asked for two beds and we dropped our bags in the room. The view was bright, and facing both the city of yellows and whites and the sea, all violet and sugar. We'd been screwed at O'Hare trying to get to Mongolia, and Senegal was the next flight out to somewhere we knew nothing about, so we'd taken it.

"I thought you said you spoke French," I said.

"I do. Some."

"Your dad's French, right?"

"Not, like, from France. He's not *from France.*"

"What are you wearing?"

"What?"

He was wearing a shirt declaring "I am proud of my black heritage."

"Where'd you get that?"

"Thrift store."

"No one's going to get the joke here. Or whatever it is. It's not even a joke."

"No one will know. And it's not a joke. I liked the shirt. Did you see the back?"

I nodded slowly, to communicate the pain it caused me. The back said "Rogers Park Women's Volleyball."

We left the hotel looking for a travel agent to book a flight out. We wanted information on all flights leaving Senegal; we wanted Madagascar or Rwanda, tomorrow. On the street we were besieged, men striding with us, matching our pace, walking backward, asking, "Where are you from? English?" while shaking Hand's hand. Looking at me: "Spanish?" I always get "Spanish," with the dark hair, the eyelashes. I have the sort of eyelashes that imply I'm wearing eyeliner, and the good fortune this has occasionally worked is nothing compared to the stares, the constant Robert Smith comparisons. And now my face was stranger, still healing, slowly, from a beating I'd taken—long story—three weeks before.

"American."

"Ameri*kahn*, ah. Welcome to Dakar! You have accident! Your face! Need mask like Phantom! Ha-ha! You like Dakar? How long you been in Dakar?"

"Twenty minutes."

"Oh ha-ha. Twenty minutes! Very good. Joke! Welcome! Welcome! Do you need taxi? Tour? I—"

And we ducked into the travel agency.

"Where do you want to go?" asked the agent, a stately woman in cosmic blue.

"We are not sure," Hand said, in English. "We want to see our options. Do you have that kind of in-for-ma-tion? All of the avail-a-ble flights?"

This is when Hand started speaking with a Senegalese accent, without contractions and with breaks between syllables. It was almost a British accent, but a slower version, with him nodding a lot.

"Sir, where is it you want to go?" she asked. She, too, thought we were assholes.

"We want to see all of the options and then to choose from them," he said.

The woman stared. "You have to tell me where you want to go."

"Can you not first show us the flights?"

"No. I cannot."

We thanked her and walked back to the hotel and the business center to get on the Web. We checked planes leaving from Dakar. Nothing, almost nothing, without Paris first. We couldn't get to Rwanda without Paris. We couldn't get to Yemen without Paris. We could get to Madagascar, but only through South Africa. To get anywhere would take a full day or more. And visas. We couldn't even cross into the Gambia, stuck inside Senegal like a tumor, without a visa. Just getting across the continent, to Cairo, could occupy our whole week. Could we just drive from Dakar to Cairo? We couldn't. Mauritania wanted a visa, same with Mali. Neither was recommended for drivers.

"Fuck."

"We're fucked."

"*Yes!*"

There was a man on a computer behind us. It was his "yes." He was dressed for tennis, white socks Van Horned around his calves. Hand turned to him.

"My friend's in the Paris-to-Dakar rally," the man said.

"The big car-race thing?" Hand said.

"Yeah. He's in seventh place." He looked American, but his accent had something in it. He was looking at a page of results.

"Wow. Motorcycle or car?" Hand said. Hand was interested.

"Motorcycle," the man said. "He's very good."

Hand knew about the race. Hand knew things like this. He knew how many guerrilla-killed gorillas there were each year in the Congo, and how many tons of cocaine were imported weekly from Colombia, how they did it and how pure it was, and who ran which cartel with the help of which U.S. agencies and for how long. And how Spinoza was actually autistic—he'd read this recently but couldn't remember where, but it was true! They'd studied DNA!—and that you could grow the bones of dwarfs by attaching external bone-growing devices that looked like medieval torture instruments. It worked! he would yell; he'd seen a documentary, and one guy had grown almost a foot, though some dwarfs objected, calling him some sort of Uncle Tom.... On and on, for twenty years I'd heard this shit, from first grade, when he claimed you'd get worms if you touched your penis—and always this mixture of the true, the almost true, and the apocryphal—he'd veer within this emporium of anecdote like an angry drunk, but he stood steadfastly behind all of his stories, never with a twinge of doubt or even allowances for your own.

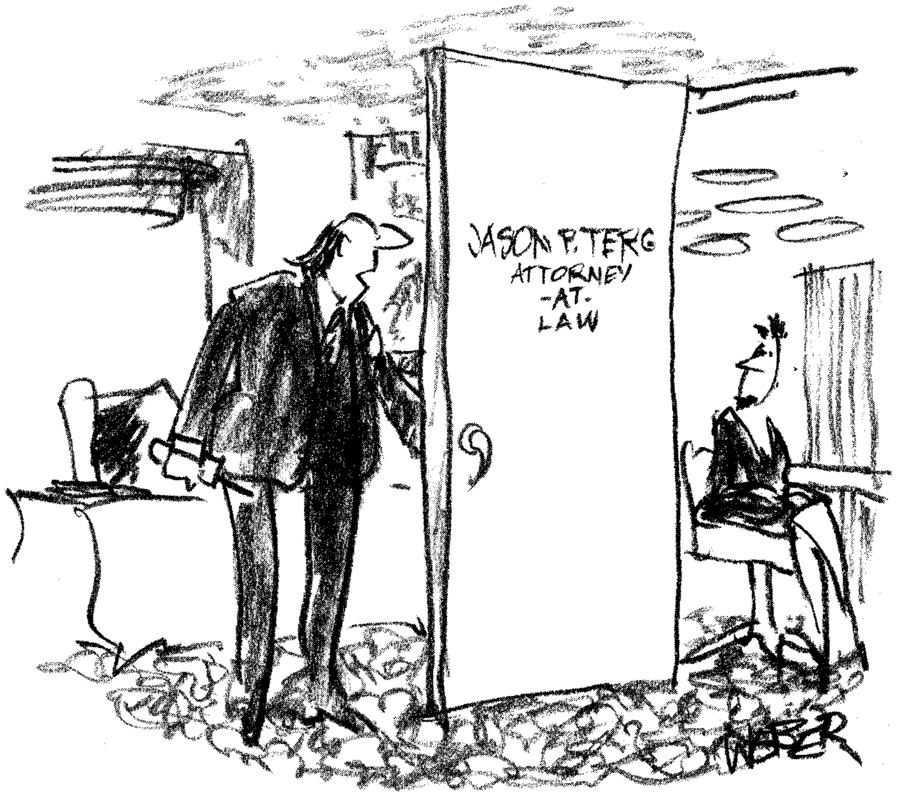
"Where are you from?" Hand asked the tennis man.

"Chile."

"Your English is very American."

"I live in Fort Lauderdale," he said.

Chilean but living in Florida and now in Senegal waiting for a friend riding a bike from Paris. He was like us, I thought, flattering myself and Hand—



"Ms. Burney, do we have anything on right and wrong?"

world travellers who defied God and beat time in planes and rented cars.

As Hand and this man talked, I tried more connections on the Web travel sites. Dakar to the Congo: no. Dakar to Kenya: yes, but wildly expensive and through Paris. Dakar to Mongolia: no. This was so wrong. Why wouldn't there be planes going from Senegal to Mongolia? I'd always assumed, vaguely, that the rest of the world was even better connected than the U.S., that passage between all countries outside of America was constant and easy—that all other nations were huddled together, trading information and commiserating, like smokers outside a building. We left.

Minutes later, we were girding for death. What was this cop doing in our car? Or was he a soldier? He was taking us to the place where tourists were killed. If nuns could be killed in Colombia, we could be killed in Africa. Even in Senegal, which hadn't been billed as particularly dangerous, at least according to the few minutes of Web research we'd done at the hotel. But what did we really know? Nothing. We were fools, and now we were driving to our deaths in a rental car. Janet Jackson was tinkling from the speakers, asking what we had done for her of late.

The cop was sitting in the back seat, directing our turnings. He was tall, about forty-five, thin, wearing a tan uniform and what looked like Foster Grants. He had been standing in the road directing traffic when he told us to stop. We pulled over, and Hand's French hadn't worked. The man could not get our crime through Hand's head. Exasperated, finally he opened the back door.

Now he was directing us through alleys near the center of Dakar. One of us was going to be dragged around by his penis.

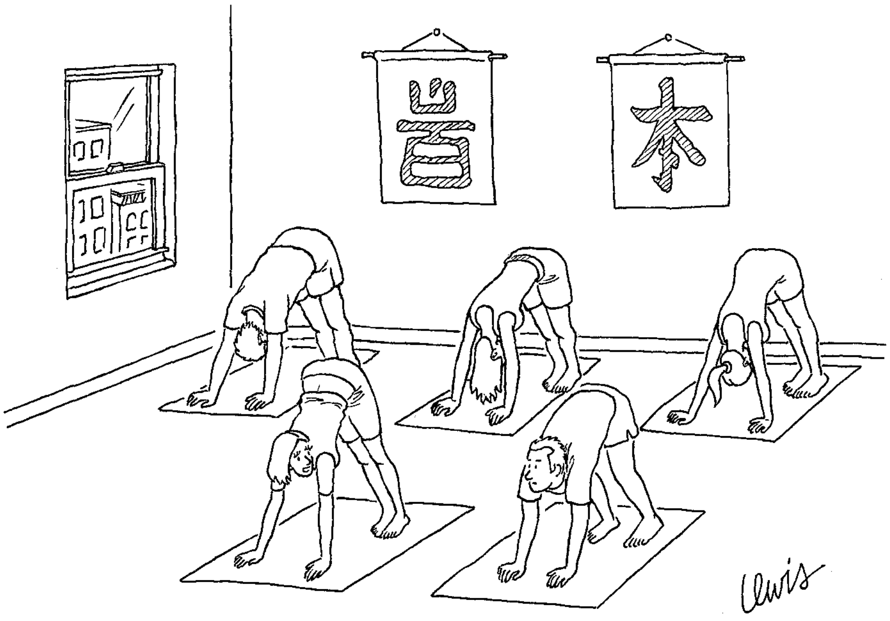
Hand and I needed to put together some sort of plan and were speaking in very speedy English, in case the man knew any.

"Thisiswhentheydragyouaroundbyyourpenis," I said.

"Notfunny. Shouldwetrytobribehimnow?"

"Nonotyetwaitasec."

In Senegal, you weren't supposed to trust the police. Were you? Or maybe that's Peru—



"You do yoga like a guy."

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We passed small walled fortresses with driveways flanked by armed guards.

"Youthinkwe'regoingtothepolicestation?"

"Ihavenoidea."

Hand was periodically turning to the man and trying more French. I tensed. It was Hand who dozens of times had brought us near the brink of injury or expulsion or infection or death; Hand who three weeks ago had fairly directly brought the wrath of three Wisconsin fuckers upon me as he and I were supposed to be packing up Jack's stuff. Jack, who otherwise would have been here with us, was killed six months ago, on the highway, ten miles from his house. And now we were here. I don't know if that explains anything.

The policeman barked orders, with his big dry hand, the one not in my bag, near my ear, pointing left or right at every turn. We seemed to be circling. It was arbitrary. We were dead.

The cop signalled us to pull over. I did, behind a taxi, in front of a bar. The cop pointed to a street sign. This was, we realized, exactly where he had stopped us in the first place. We'd made some kind of elaborate and misshapen loop to get back here. The sign was a blue circle, bordered in red, indicating that the road prohibited the travelling on it of anything but buses and taxis.

Ah. Hand and I made exaggerated sounds of understanding and approval. "Aaaahhhh!" Hand said. We were happy to be alive. We had broken a law and that's . . . O.K.! Now we'd pay a fine and be off. We all smiled and laughed. We laughed and nodded our heads. Stupid us! I wanted to hug the man but didn't know local custom.

We would live.

"I am so sorry," the man at the hotel's rental counter said. The car had died two blocks from the sign. "I knew this might happen, but I hoped it would not be so soon."

I blinked into the sun, and wondered just what the hell we were doing. Out there were the Senegalese, and beyond them the Gambia, and the sun was already finding the uppermost points of its arc, and we were still in the hotel lobby. Where was teleporting, for fuck's sake? They promised us teleporting decades ago. Why were we spending billions on unmanned missions to Mars when we could be betting the cash on teleporting? Fuck regular movement. Fuck cars, rental cars, and wheels and engineering, and big metal machines that were always too loud and used this ridiculous kind of fuel, so goddam medieval—

In the hotel room, waiting for a new

car, we both fell asleep and when we woke it was five.

"Piss."

"What a waste."

"We've done nothing."

No delta, no mangroves, no Gambia. We were hungry.

We ran into the Chilean-American tennis man in the lobby—

"What's his name again?" I whispered.

"Raymond."

"Hey, Raymond!" I said.

"Hello, my friends!"

—and had a taxi take us six blocks to the Italian place he liked. The cabbie asked for the equivalent of fifty cents, and I gave him ten dollars; he said thank you, thank you, and told us that he'd wait until we were done to take us back, or anywhere else, anytime, while we stayed in his country, you friends!

The restaurant was empty but for four drunk and round Italians at the bar talking to the drunk Italian hostess.

"She's gorgeous, isn't she?" Raymond said. "That's why I had to come back."

Hand, blond and tall and dark-eyed, I guess you'd say doe-eyed, was well liked by women. He agreed. "She is nice. But I'm really starting to have a thing for the Senegalese women."

"You, too?" said Raymond. "I know. They are superb." He stretched out the "perb" for what seemed like five lascivious minutes. Raymond raised his finger, about to make a point. "But," he said, closing his eyes slowly and raising his chin, "they are all whores."

Hand and I stared at Raymond. We were stuck with this man, even though it was becoming obvious that he was not of our stripe. He was a bigger asshole than we were. Friendships, even temporary ones like this, were based on proximity and chance, and so rarely made any sense at all.

The music piped in was a short, ever-repeating loop of Dire Straits, Pink Floyd, Eagles, and "White Album" Beatles. We had fettuccine and Senegalese beer. We learned that Raymond worked in cell phones. Something involving G.P.S. and cell phones and how, soon enough, everyone would know—for their own safety, he insisted—where everyone else in the world was, by tracking cell phones. This was, he insisted, for good, not evil. Not for surveillance, not for spying, not for control, for safety! For the children. For grandparents and wives.

After dinner, Hand asked the cabbie, who'd been waiting without radio or newspaper, to take us to see live music. "You know," said Hand, "like Youssou N'Dour." We'd read in the hotel-lobby guidebook that Youssou N'Dour lived in Dakar and owned a club. The cabbie seemed to understand, began driving, and a few minutes later pulled up in front of an outdoor café.

"Here is the location of the music that is live?" asked Hand.

Raymond looked at Hand. Hand needed reining in.

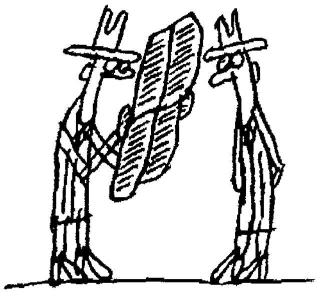
"Yes, yes," said the driver, waving us out of the car. "You like, you like." We got out.

It looked fine, a French-café sort of place, outdoor seating, inside warmly lit. But there was no music at all; just wrought-iron tables and a floor of white tile, a black slate bar with a bowl of Manet oranges. We walked in anyway. We'd get a drink and leave.

All eyes jumped to us. There were groups of men and groups of women. The men were tourists and the women were local. I went to the bathroom, and the small round scallop-shaped soap I traded between my wet hands smelled of home.

I found Raymond and Hand at a table outside, with two women, lighter-skinned than most Senegalese, both with long, braided hair. Raymond stood and gave me his chair and grabbed another for himself. The girls surveyed me briefly and looked away.

There were drinks for everyone. I was introduced to the two, whose names I pretended to understand and whose limp hands I held momentarily and then dropped. They looked about twenty, twenty-two. They were sisters, and I felt again, as I had so many times with Hand and Jack—who together formed a loud perfect rockabilly duo of rollicking charm—like deadweight.



"They're from Sierra Leone," said Raymond.

"Refugees," added Hand.

They were just short of glorious, with large dark eyes and crooked, oversized teeth. Raymond and Hand were trying to speak French with them.

"We speak little French," the older one said. "Speak English. In Sierra Leone we speak English."

"So you are liking it here in the Dakar?" Hand asked.

The older one nodded. Hand ordered more drinks and then leaned toward them. He was about to dig in.

"So what's the situation like in Sierra Leone now? Is Charles Taylor still lurking around? I should know this, I guess, but it's been a while since I read about it. Have you seen any of the violence around the diamond trade?"

They looked dumbfounded, turning to Raymond, as if he might translate. Hand continued. "What did you do for a living? Are you students? When did you guys leave? I mean, are your parents still there?"

The sisters looked at each other.

"What?" the older said, smiling.

"Your parents? In Sierra Leone?"

"Yes. Live there."

"So how old are you two?" Raymond asked.

"What?"

"How old are you?"

The older one, to whom Raymond had directed the question, laughed and looked at her sister. She shook her head. She didn't understand.

"How many years are you?" Hand tried.

The older held up her hands in a "stop" sort of motion, closed them, then did it again.

"Twenty," Hand said.

She nodded.

Raymond laughed.

"Your English is not very good, is it?" Hand said.

"What?" she said.

Raymond said it in French.

"Speak English!" the girl said. "We are from Sierra Leone!"

Where was this going? No one could know. Soon I stopped listening.

I watched the sidewalk over the café's low hedge. The place was stocked with chubby European or American men, mostly middle-aged and cheerful. Some had garnered the attentions of the available women, others waited patiently with friends. By the door was a man with no legs, sitting on a mat.

Now the younger sister was laughing about something Hand had said, making a point of grabbing his arm with both hands and burying her head in his shoulder to demonstrate the great mirth he'd generated. Hand rolled his eyes to me, like a cat had jumped into his lap. More drinks were ordered.

"So we go to disco now?" the older said to Raymond.

Hand and Raymond looked at each other, then at me. I shrugged.

I walked to the cab, not caring if they came with us or not. I was groped by the man without legs. He wanted money. Raymond and Hand appeared, without the women. An old woman with a tin cup placed herself in front of us, sticking the cup a few inches from my mouth. Another woman from the bar appeared, too. We were surrounded. We backed into the cab. Raymond got in the front seat and closed his door. Hand got in the rear and I sunk in after him, but the no-legged man was now halfway in the car and the door wouldn't close. I could smell his breath—worlds contained within.

"Just give him something," said Raymond, laughing. It wasn't funny. This was the kind of thing that happened in India, or in the Bible.

"I forgot. My brother Woolard is coming by."

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I gave the man the coins in my pocket, and while counting them he backed away long enough for us to get the door closed. The old woman appeared at the open window, thrusting her head inside. The car was moving, but her head was fully in our cab. Raymond's hand was on her shoulder, pushing her away. He shoved, but too roughly—she fell back into the shrubbery with a shriek.

We were off.

"Jesus," I said.

"That was wretched," said Hand.

"These people are poor," said Raymond, without turning around, talking through the wind pouring through his window.

"But that's just not right," Hand said.

"Listen," Raymond said, now turning to us. "You're here. You came here. You left the hotel. You walk these streets, you allow your path to be chosen by me, by"—jerking a thumb toward the cabbie—"this driver. You invite things to happen. You open the door. You inhale. And if you inhale the chaos you give the chaos, the chaos gives back. You know this?"

I felt my forehead tighten, indicating I was thinking—often my forehead starts thinking before I do. I committed what he'd said to memory—it was a jigsaw dumped on a rug, but I was hoping I could put it back together, later.

We rode in silence for a few minutes.

"That didn't even make sense," Hand muttered.

"The imbalance is there," Raymond continued. My tolerance for Raymond was waning. "We know we're stronger, but we ignore this. You watch 'Star Trek,' how they—what's the word for their beaming up and down?"

"Teleporting," I said, shocked at how this thought had just plowed right into my own back yard.

"Right," Raymond said. "They teleport in and out of troubled planets?"

"Wait," Hand said, actually raising his palm to Raymond's face. "You get 'Star Trek' in Chile?"

"Of course."

Hand snorted, impressed. "O.K., go on."

"So this teleporting was based on a Cold War mentality. This was the American foreign-policy model then. This was based on the American strength, the American ability to move and to change the worlds they touched."

The cabbie pulled up in front of a club called Hollywood.

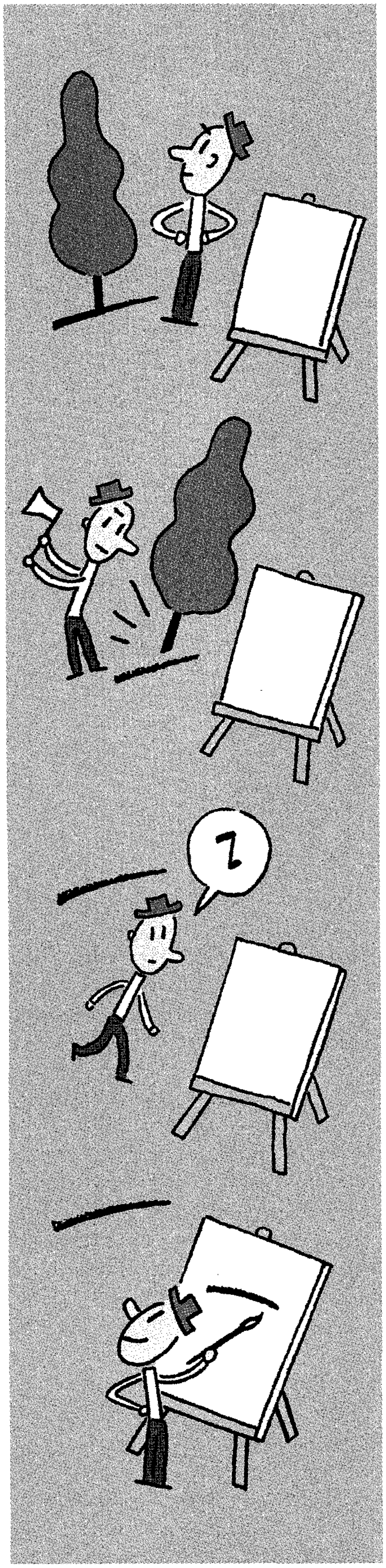
"Is this the live music?" I asked.

"Yes, yes, you love there!" he said, shooing us inside. "I wait here."

It was a small disco, pink and purple, full of large framed movie stills in black-and-white. Two or three life-size pictures of James Dean and Marilyn Mon-

THE MINIMALIST

BY PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET



roe, and one each of Tom Selleck, Sandra Bullock, and Charlie Sheen, but also, strangely, seven different shots of Val Kilmer in "Top Gun." The place was empty apart from twelve young white men with crewcuts. Sailors.

"I could do that," Hand said.

"Be a sailor? You're high," I said.

"For a year I could do that."

"Just for the pants. That's why you'd do it."

Hand was intercepted by a tall thin woman in a halter top and pleather pants. She led him to a small dance floor, lit from below and facing a mirror. Debbie Harry was singing "Heart of Glass."

"This is Engela," Hand said after the song had finished. "She's studying to become a lawyer."

Hand bought shots for them both. He drank his; she left hers; so he drank it, too. She played with Hand's ear. Two sailors were on the dance floor, without women, admiring their own legs moving inside their tight, tapered, delicately bleached jeans.

I went to the bar for a shot of anything. The woman serving me was wearing a white sports bra that looked like it had been mauled by tigers. I turned again. Hand was showing his friend something. A piece of paper. A picture. What was it?

I grabbed it.

"What the fuck are you doing?" I yelled. It was a picture of Jack. Hand stood and looked at me, heavy-lidded with pity.

"I told her we were looking for our friend," he said.

"What does that mean?"

He was drunk already.

"You know what it means," he said.

"That doesn't even make sense," I said.

"So what the fuck?" he said.

"Don't ever show that picture to some random waitress again," I said.

"Guys!" Raymond said, with an arm between us. "Easy."

We were home by one. In the cool black lobby we waited with Raymond for the elevator.

"So where to next?" he asked. "Tomorrow."

"Not sure yet," Hand said. "You?"

"I go to Portugal, with my friend. A vacation after his race."

"You think he'll win?" I asked.

"Win? Not a chance. But that's not the point."

I thought it was the point. "Why not?" I asked.

"The point is to offer yourself to death and see if you're chosen."

"Jesus," I said. The elevator arrived.

"Not him."

"Who?"

"I don't believe in Jesus," Raymond said. "I think He would be horrified that we called Jesus Christ His son."

He was losing me. Hand steered us back onto the main trail. "So, Portugal," he said.

"That should be nice," I said. I don't know why I said this. I didn't think of Portugal as nice, though I'd never seen a picture, or couldn't remember one.

"Well," said Raymond, "I dread it, frankly. I love being here. I love wearing my clothes in these new places. It's the only thing I love, maybe—travel. I am finished with women," he said, chin jutting with an adolescent sort of defiance.

"We're liking it so far," Hand said. "The trip and all. But—"

"So why not stay in Senegal?" Raymond said. "In a week you will meet everyone. You will be kings."

"I guess," I said. "But we're liking the *moving*." I set my head on the elevator wall, wondering why I had used a pronoun that included Hand, whom I now hated. I was so tired my eyes felt distended.

Raymond's floor rang and the doors opened.

"There is travel and there are babies," he said, stepping out. "Everything else is drudgery and death."

I had been given eighty thousand dollars to screw in a light bulb. There's almost no way to dress it up; that's what it was. I was working for a contracting company. We'd just built a sunroom for a family on Orchard, and it turned out the owner worked at this ad agency, and while putting together logo proposals for a light-bulb maker she'd used a silhouette of me on my stepladder, and tried it out on the company, and the company said, "Sure." I said, "Sure," too. In lieu of cash they offered me stock, stock that could mature, with a split or two, they said, into ten, twelve million, so good were these new light bulbs. They were brilliant, I told them. Their bulbs were fucking great, I said. Then I gave them the routing number for the eighty thousand dollars, their cash offer and apparently the going rate for people transformed into silhouettes to sell things. I felt briefly, mistakenly, powerful: my outline burned into the minds of millions! But then I came back down, crashing.

Jack was twenty-six and had died a few months after the money came. Jack was smarter than us and better than us in everything. When we were kids, everyone assumed we were as dumb as we acted. Soon enough, though, everyone realized that Jack was different from me and Hand, that he had calm where I had chaos and wisdom where Hand had just a huge gaping mouth. But he was not cool; he didn't have the gene. We wanted him to speed, but Jack would not speed. He drove with his hands perfectly at ten and two, which afforded him the most control, but it blocked, completely, his view of the speedometer. Every few seconds he would have to raise his thumbs, as if giving a double thumbs-up, granting himself a view of the gauge. It drove us nuts.

So when I first heard that there had been an accident, for a second I was happy, because Jack could never have been driving fast enough for a car accident; I pictured car crashes as involving only cars going very fast, two cars colliding, both at top speed. Not a truck coming from behind, doing eighty, downhill, hitting Jack's car, the momentum driving the wheels up and over Jack's, grinding it flat as it passed, twelve wheels at once practically, all of it happening in half a second.

This was six months ago, and in those months everything was pulling at my eyes. Songs were knocking me from wall to wall, certain songs in certain progressions roughed up my throat, brought me near tears without delivering me to any kind of catharsis. I was shaking my head at how perfect some song was, and then I was in the car, on the way to K mart to buy a lesson kit, convinced I could teach myself piano and, with my exceptional taste, make an album, and then I would double back and think, Fuck, I should learn to fly airplanes. That's the thing I really want to do. *Fly planes.* But it would take years, and I needed it quicker. What I wanted to do was take a course in the bar, take it and then practice law, all without having done law school at all. Or maybe I should just open the police-souvenir store, as I'd planned in eighth grade, or the general store in New Mexico with the local handicrafts. And marry a woman cop. She would be huge and strong and named Heather.

I was arguing with strangers constantly now, though only in my cloudy skull, while adopting this hollow admonishing tone, which even I couldn't stand:

—You, driving the Lexus.

—Me?

—Yes, you. You paid too much.

It helped me work through problems, solving things, reaching conclusions that were final, edifying, and even, occasionally, mutually agreeable.

—You, on the motorcycle.

—Yes.

—It's only a matter of time.

—I know.

It would be fun, I guess, if it weren't constant, and so loud.

We woke up late. It was 9 A.M. "What a waste," Hand said. "We could have slept in the car on our way somewhere."

"We'll be fine."

"We really have to move."

We drove to the airport and made for the Air Afrique desk. Behind the counter were three queens—grand, dressed in the most florid and glorious wares, skin luminous like polished lanterns.

We asked what they had flying out.

"Where are you going?" they asked.

"What do you have flying out?" I said.

"You do not know where you are going?"

"Well, yes and no."

They had a flight to Mauritania, but Mauritania wanted a visa.

"Anything else?"

"There is a flight tomorrow to Casablanca."

Morocco didn't require a visa. But we'd have to stay in Senegal one more night. Which meant more waste, and the diminished likelihood of our making it around the world. But we had no choice. We'd stay one more night.

We left the airport, heading for the coast, for Saly, where there were beaches. First we had to swim. Then to the Gambia and back. We could make it, we figured, but we'd have to speed.

We were lost before we left the airport. In front of an abandoned hangar we stopped for directions. There were about thirty men, half of them in suits, standing in the parking lot. A contingent of five approached the car. We explained where we needed to go, Saly, and instead of directing us two of them began arguing, each with his hands on the back-door handle. We asked again for directions. Directions only, we said.

Then a young man was in the back seat.

"I take you there," he said.

"What?" Hand said.

"I show you the way, then you pay me, no problem."

Hand looked at me, I looked at Hand.

"I show you, you pay me, no problem," he said again.

His name was Abass. He was about twenty-five, wearing a nylon sweatsuit; he sat where the officer had sat. In a few minutes, he had us on the road to Saly and had rendered himself redundant.

"Shouldntwejustdrophimoffnow?" I asked.

"Ithinkthatwouldberude. Maybewewanttotalktohimandpickhisbrain—"

He stayed. We liked him. He liked James Brown, and Hand had a James Brown tape, so we played James Brown. He liked, most of all, Wu-Tang Clan, but we didn't have any Wu-Tang Clan. We had Dolly Parton.

The road was an endless marketplace; the kind of road bearing strip malls and fast-food outlets in the U.S. but here tire shops, open-air refrigerator outlets, and fruit stands. Three gangly boys playing Foosball at a table five feet from the road. Small buses, bright blue, overfilled with people. The bus never actually stopped. The children were filthy, but the Mobils and Shells were pristine, as were the adults. Everywhere there were people in dashikis, long enough to brush the road's unpaved shoulder but still unbesmirched.

The light was the familiar dusty white. I decided that when we got to Saly we'd give Abass half of what we had on us—about twelve hundred dollars.

"You have wife?" Hand asked.

"No, no. Soon," he said.

"Kids?"

"No, no. Soon."

"Girlfriend?"

"Yeah! Yeah!"

"Nice girlfriend?"

"Yeah!" he said, holding up three fingers. Three girlfriends.

What would he do with the money?

Start a business? Buy his way out of Senegal? I didn't have the tools to imagine.

At a stoplight, a man was selling orange juice. We flagged him over to buy three drinks. But it wasn't orange juice. It was brake fluid. Behind him, an enormous pile of fish, the shape of an anthill, lay rotting in the sun.

"We should let him get off here," I said.

Hand made the offer. Abass shook his head and smiled.

"He wants to go to Saly," Hand said.

We drove on. Hand and Abass were talking about something that prompted, from Hand, many expressions of surprise. He turned to me.

"I think he said his father was the Ambassador to Zaire."

"Tell him congratulations," I said, wondering why the son of an ambassador was in our car riding to Saly.

Hand and Abass exchanged words.

"He's dead ten years," Hand explained.

We expressed our condolences. I handed Abass a chocolate-chip energy bar. He pointed out the window, at a French Army truck going the other way.

"Ask him his last name," I said.

Hand asked.

"Diallo," Abass said.

"Really?" Hand said.

Another French troop truck.

"Tell him," I said, "we have a very famous Diallo in America."

Hand told him. Abass was interested.

"Abass wants to know," Hand said, "what our Diallo did to become famous."

We drove in silence. We'd never be able to explain it, and I didn't want to spoil the mood.

"Tell him he's a singer," I said.

At Saly, we turned off. This was a resort complex, and the foliage was lusher here, the streetsides uncluttered—like a Floridian national park. We pulled into a hotel called Savana Saly and in the lot stepped out and stretched.

I was getting the money ready—this particular wad drawn from my inner waist pocket, under my belt—when Abass told us how much he wanted.

"What?" said Hand. Abass spoke quickly and sternly. They exchanged words. "I think he wants eighty dollars."

"Eighty dollars for getting us on the highway?"

"I guess so."

"That's too much," Hand told Abass.

He glared at Hand. Now he was not our friend. Eighty dollars for three turns and an hour on the highway. He spit more words to Hand.

"He says he has to get a cab back to Dakar," Hand said.

There was no way he was getting a cab back to Dakar. He'd take the bus and pocket the eighty dollars. We didn't like him. He knew we'd feel awful paying him less than what he asked, but eighty dollars was wrong. I looked up and the sky gave me no tether. We'd been driving too long and we hadn't eaten—

I wanted a ceiling, but it was too thin and porous. I wanted something accountable above—

"Hey!"

"What? What?"

"You're back."

"Sorry."

I gave Abass the eighty dollars but not the hundreds I had planned on. He took the money and wrote his name and number on a piece of paper, urging us to call if we needed help getting back to Dakar. We said we'd be sure to call. The fucker.

He walked to the highway. Hand and I stood in the lot watching his back.

"That's too bad," Hand said.

At the reception desk, French tourists sat on their suitcases, waiting for deliverance. They stared at us dismissively.

We went to swim. The beach was slim and rocky, the water a vibrating cobalt blue. The bathers were old and white, flesh melting downward, the men in bikinis, many of the women topless and drooping without caution. Hand ran, jumped on and off a huge gray gumdrop rock and into the sea.

"Fuck!" he yelled. He stood waist deep; his hands shot to his face. "It's fucking cold!"

I stepped in; it was brutal. The air was about ninety, but the water was crisp, bracing. The cold of an upper-Wisconsin lake, in June.

I spread my towel and I laid my head on the sand. A bird, fifty feet above, fell from the sky like a plane. It crashed through the water, broken, but in a second rose, fish in beak, and flew toward the white shore or the green hills above.

I burrowed my head deeper into the terry cloth and closed my eyes. Only on sand like this did I ever feel as though I could sleep forever, that sleep could be a destination, like a warm island full of food. The comfort was limitless, and I knew I was mouthing the words "Fantastic, so good, fantastic, so good," into the towel, but couldn't help it. The sun had half my face, one eye, a shoulder, and the rest was mine. I felt the heat of the light pressing into me, in my neck, my crown, the side of my calf, nudging with strong bony forefingers.

We dressed quickly so we could drive through the countryside and tape money to donkeys. We'd been in Senegal for thirty hours and hadn't given anything away.

The plan was Hand's. As we drove, hair still wet, we looked for donkeys so we could tape money to them for their owners to find. We wondered what the donkey owners would think. We had no idea. Money taped to a donkey? It was a great idea. But each time we saw a donkey there was someone standing nearby.

"We have to find one alone, so the owner will be surprised," Hand said.

"Right."

Periodically, we'd pass through a village, the buildings, squat and clay, abutting the road, kids running out of open doorways. But we couldn't find a fucking donkey. Cows would be just as good, we thought, but every time we stopped and approached a cow on foot, a car would come down the road, or a bright-blue bus, or a farmer, and we'd abort. At one point, when we really thought we were going to do it, had the money in a pouch and the tape all around it and a cow picked out and were only a few feet away, it wasn't a car that came but a whole caravan of men, French, we guessed, on four-wheel A.T.V.s, eleven of them, in a row, half with white girlfriends strapped around their waists, all with aviator glasses, a few with scarves.

"Good Lord God, no," Hand said.

We gave up on taping money to animals. We were now looking for people. Anyone to unload the money on. We found a group of boys working in a field, raking hay and throwing it into a large wooden wagon attached to a mule. Five boys—

"Brothers, probably," said Hand. We stopped on the side of the road.

"They're gonna see us," I said.

“Then get out and give ’em some money, idiot.”

“Not yet. I gotta make sure.”

“Here,” Hand said, spreading a map between us. “This is like a fucking stakeout or something.”

—working together, without pause. They were perfect. All I had to do was get out of the car, walk a hundred feet, and hand them part of the fourteen hundred dollars (Hand had found more in his shoe) we had left. We had to get rid of this money. Tomorrow we would cash more checks—swoop! swoop!—and start over. We were already so far behind.

“That one guy looks like a dad,” I said.

“No, he’s just a little older than the others.”

“I can’t give it to them if the dad’s there.”

“Why?”

“Because the dad won’t take it.”

“Bullshit.”

“No, it’s a pride thing. He won’t take the money in front of his sons.”

“Not here, stupid. These guys know they need it and that we can afford it. They’re not taking it from a neighbor, they’re taking it from people who it means, you know, next to nothing to.”

“You do it.”

“No, you. It’s your money.”

“No, it’s not. That’s the point.”

“Just go.”

“I can’t. Maybe we should wait. The dad’ll go get some water or something. Or you could create a diversion.”

We sat, watching.

“This is predatory,” I said.

“Yeah, but it’s O.K.”

“Let’s go. We’ll find someone better.”

We drove, though I wasn’t sure it would ever feel right. It was wrong to stalk them, and even more wrong not to give them the money, a life-changing amount of money here, where the average yearly earnings were, we’d read, about sixteen hundred dollars. It was all so wrong, and now we were a mile away. To the right, beyond the amber fields and a thin row of trees, the Atlantic shimmered like a dime.

The sun was low and the air was cooling. We approached a huge warehouse. The place was immense, and shuttered, its parking lot covered in grass. There were no other buildings for miles. We parked the car behind the warehouse, hiding it from the road. We imagined the possibility of roaming marauders who would strip our car bare and then move on. With the car hidden, we could walk through the fields and head to the ocean, less than a mile west.

The ground was hard and brown and dotted with seashells, white and broken. After a few minutes, we could see the ocean. It was the lightest blue, a dry and sun-faded blue. A few hundred yards from the shore, there was a group of small houses, all the same design and standing in formation. About fifteen of them, cottage-size and neatly arrayed, on a sort of plateau, separated from us and from the beach beyond by a moat, sixteen feet down and filled with what seemed to be—

“Sewage,” I said.

The builders, it looked like, had run out of money. This was a resort-to-be, but without any sign of recent work. Only these small windowless homes. We got as close as we could before the moat asserted itself. The water in the moat was too deep and dirty to wade through, and too wide to jump.

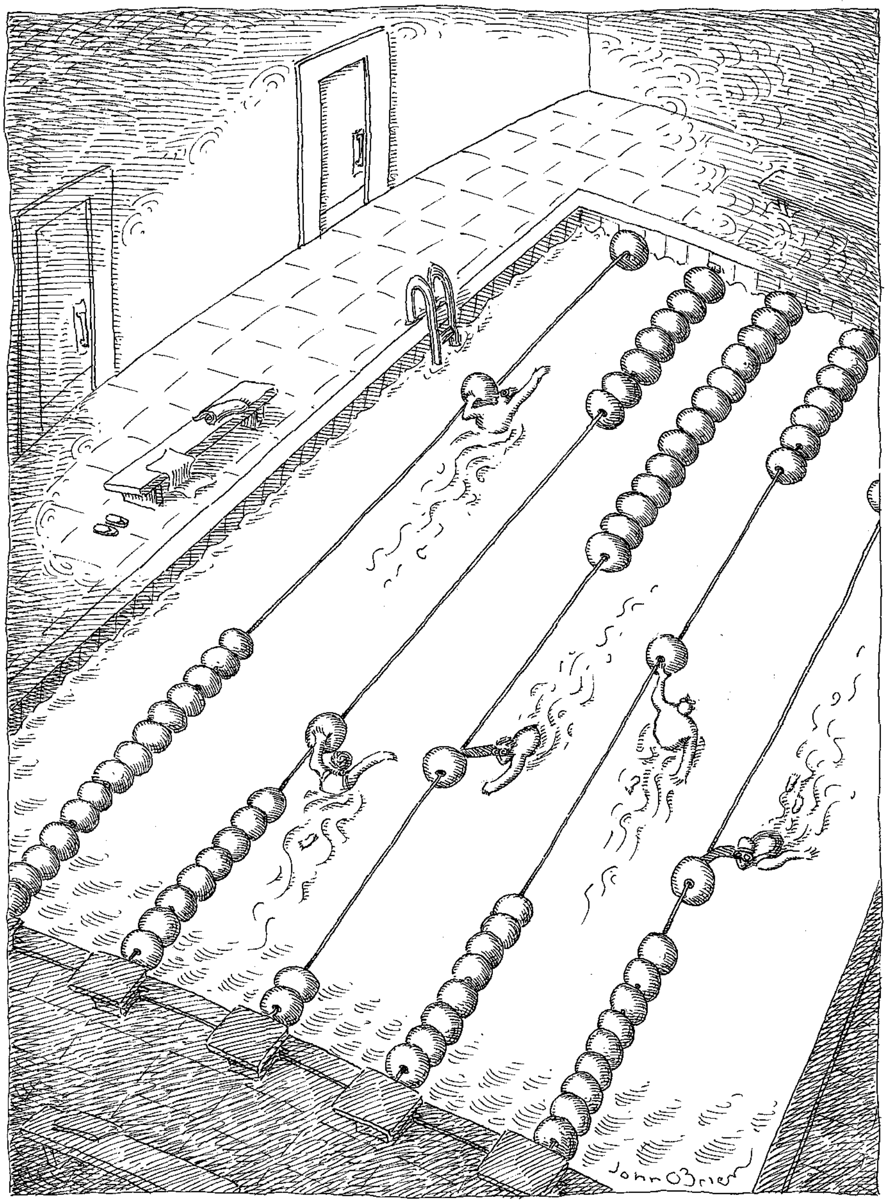
A man walked into view on the other side of the moat, among the houses. He was holding some kind of electric device in his hand, black and with a long antenna. He stared.

“Security,” Hand said. “They’ve got someone guarding the place.”

“We should leave.”

We were watching the man and he was watching us.

We turned and shuffled away. Was he



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armed? He could shoot us if he wanted to and no one would ever know. We sat behind a pair of thick shrubs.

I stood, and the man was gone.

"Let's go," Hand said.

We walked alongside the moat, hoping to find a place to cross. We soon saw a clothesline threaded between a porch and a tree. Shirts and pants hung from it, and on the porch there were towels and an Indiana University umbrella.

"Jesus," I said. "Someone's living here."

"We could plant some money in there," Hand said. "Put it in a pair of pants."

"Yeah, on the clothesline. That'd be good."

We went around the entire moat and at the end found an area where we could get down the bluff, about fifty feet, on to the beach, and over the water. There was a rocky sort of path, and after taking off our shoes, in case we landed somehow in the moat, we descended, sliding and jumping, and soon found ourselves jogging slightly, as if descending stairs in a hurry. Then we were jumping, and the path was now dotted with large flat rocks, like overturned dinner plates, and we were jumping at a speed that I should have found alarming but somehow didn't, and we were doing so barefoot, which might have increased the alarm but instead made it easier, because my bare feet would land on the rock and kind of wrap around it, simianlike, in a way that a shoe or sneaker or sandal couldn't. There was no time to think, which was plenty of time—I had a few fractions of a second in midair, between rocks, to calculate the location of the next rock-landing options, the stability of each, the flattest surface among them. Then the rocks ended, and I jumped into the sand with a *shhhht*.

We hopped from the middle to the side, into wet mud, the ground like wet velour. Then up a bluff, only twenty feet or so, and we were now in the resort.

The man appeared again. He wasn't a man. He was about seventeen. In his hand was a transistor radio, fuzzily broadcasting the news.

"*Bonjour*," said Hand.

"*Bonjour*," said the teen-ager.

They shook hands, the boy's grip limp and uninterested. He looked at me quickly. In French, Hand asked if he was the guard. He shook his head. He was staying at a hotel nearby, he said, waving down the shore, and was just walking. He didn't speak much French, he said. He and Hand laughed. I laughed. We stood for a moment. The boy looked at his radio and tuned the dial.

Hand said goodbye. The boy said goodbye, and we walked on, toward the beach.

"Let's skip the beach," Hand said. "I want to get back to that house and see who lives there."

"We'll do the clothesline."

It didn't look as though anyone was home, so we could sneak in, dump the money, and leave. That was almost better, we agreed, than taping it to a donkey.

We crept around the house, our own skulking making the place seem more sinister. There was the dark and vacuumed smell of clay. This was the sort of place where bodies were found. Or guns. We peeked around. Through the open front door we could see the corner of a bed, and a calendar on the wall.

"You go," I said.

"You."

"You."

"You."

"You."

Hand stepped around until he was peering through the front porch of the house.

"*Bonjour!*" he said.

A man stepped through the door and into the light. It was the transistor-radio teen-ager from before. He wasn't happy.

Hand shook the boy's hand again. The boy was on his porch and we were below, grinning with shame. We said sorry a few times, for intruding, then Hand said, "So is it you leeve here?"

The man didn't understand.

"It's nice here, yes?" Hand said. "You're smart to stay here." He gestured to the house. "It's very nice."

The boy stared at Hand. Hand turned

to me, and I understood. I took the money from my Velcro pocket, slowly, the way a criminal would lay down a gun before a cop. I took the stack of bills and aimed them at the boy. He didn't move.

"Sorry," I said, looking down.

"Can we . . ." said Hand, gesturing his arms like pistons, in a give-and-take sort of way.

"We want to . . ." I tried.

"Will you take?" Hand said, pointing to the money as you would to a broken toy offered to a skeptical child.

The boy took the bills. We smiled. We both made gestures meaning, Yes, it's yours. We can't use it. Please don't worry about it. Thank you for taking it off our hands. You have done us the greatest of favors.

The boy glanced at the stack and smiled at us grimly. He turned and with two steps was back in his house.

The warm wind was good. We were giddy. There was a hole in my shirt, in the left underarm, and the air darted through on tiny wings. We were walking quickly back to the car.

"There's nothing wrong with that," said Hand.

"There can't be," I said.

"We gave the guy money."

"How much was it, you figure?"

"It was most of what I had left. About eight hundred dollars."

"He took it. We left."

"Nothing wrong with that."

"Not a thing. It was simple. It was good."

We retrieved the car from behind the warehouse. The day had been long, and soon we would rest. We needed to eat, and I wanted beer. I wanted four beers and many potatoes, then sleep.

"I want to marry this country," I said.

"It's a good country," Hand said.

"I want to spend a lifetime here."

"Yeah."

"I could do it."

"Right."

And my mind leaped ahead, skipping and whistling. In the first year, I'd master French, the second join some kind of travelling medical entourage, dressing wounds and disseminating medicine. We'd do inoculations, birth control, hold the line on AIDS. After that, I'd marry a Senegalese woman and we'd raise our kids while working shoulder to shoulder—all of us—at the clinic. The kids would check people in, maybe do some minimal filing—they'd do their homework in the waiting room. I'd visit America now and then, once every few years, in Senegal I'd read the English-speaking papers once a month or so. We'd live on the coast.

"Sounds good," said Hand.

"But that's one lifetime."

"Yeah."

"But while doing that one I'd want to be able to have done other stuff. Whole other lives. The one where I sail—"

"I know, on a boat you made yourself."

"Yeah, for a couple of years, through the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Caspian Sea."

"Can you sail? You can't sail."

We passed two more white people on A.T.V.s.

"You know quantum theory, right?"

This is how he started; it was always friendly enough, but—

"Sure," I lied.

"Well, there's this guy named Deutsch who's taken quantum theory and applied it to everything. To all life. You know Max Planck, right?"

"Go on," I said. Hand was such a prick.

"Anyway," he continued. "Quantum physics says that atoms aren't so hard and fast, just sitting there like fake fruit or something, touchable and solid. They're mercurial. They come and go. They appear and disappear. They occupy different places at once. They can be teleported. Scientists have actually done this."

"They've teleported atoms."

"Yeah. Of course."

No one tells me anything. "I can't believe I missed that," I said.

"They also slowed the speed of light."

"I did hear that."

"Slowed it to a Sunday crawl."

"That's what I heard."

We drove as the sky went pink, then barn red, passing small villages emptying in the night, people standing around small fires.

Hand went on, "So if these atoms can exist in different places at once—and I don't think any physicists argue about that—this guy Deutsch argues that everything can exist in a bunch of places at once. We're all made of the same electrons and protons, right, so if they exist in many places at once, and can be teleported, then there must be multiple us's, and multiple worlds, simultaneously."

"Jesus."

"That's the multiverse."

"Oh. That's a nice name for it."

We passed a clearing with a basketball court, the backboard bent forward like a priest granting communion. Two young boys, one wearing red and one in blue, were scrapping under it, each ball bounce beating a rugful of dust.

"We have to stop," I said. We were already past the court.

"Why? To watch?"

"We have to play. Haven't you ever driven past a court and—"

"Those kids were about twelve."

"Then we won't keep score."

They stopped as they saw us approach. Hand called for the ball. How did they know he wouldn't leave with it? They threw it.

Hand bounced the ball, and it landed on a rock and ricocheted away. The boys laughed. Hand chased it down and returned and did some bizarre Bob Cousy layup, underhand and goofy; the ball dropped through the dented red rim. Hand shot the ball three times from the free-throw area, without luck. Now I laughed with the boys. I gave one of them a handshake, making up an elaborate series of sub-shakes involving wrists and fingers and lots of snapping. He thought I knew what I was doing.

The light kept leaking from the sky. Another boy showed up, bigger and more confident. He had newish sneakers and knee-length basketball shorts, a Puma T-shirt. He was serious. He smiled, shook our hands, but then he bore down and didn't look us in the eye. It was our two against their three, and there was dust everywhere. The tall boy was determined to win. The game got closer. I tried to switch teams, to relieve the nationalistic tension, but the boys refused.

It was ridiculous for Hand and me to be playing like this; we weren't the players—Jack was, Jack was the best pure player our school had ever seen, rhythm and speed impossible, it seemed, in someone we knew, someone from Wisconsin whose father sold seeds. We played with Jack, were humored by him, but when he wanted to he turned it up and broke us like twigs.

Very soon there were ten kids watching, then twenty, all boys, half of them barefoot. Every time the ball bounced off the court and away, toward the village, two more boys emerged to reclaim it.

It was dark now. We were passing the ball, and it was hitting our chests before we could see it. We called the game.

We walked back to the car and brought out the water we had left, took pulls, and handed it to the boy in red. He handed it to the tall one, who sipped and gave it to the blue boy, who finished it. Another boy, of about thirteen, pushed through the crowd around the car, arched his back, and said with clarity and force, "My father is in the Army. My name is Steven."

And then he walked away, back to the village.

The tall Puma boy spoke some English; his name, he said, was Denis. "Where do you live?" he asked.

"Chicago," I said.

"The Bulls!" he said. "You see Bulls?"

Hand told him we'd been to games, even while Jordan was still active. And this was almost true. We'd been to one game, with Jordan playing the first half of a blowout.

Denis's mouth formed an exaggerated oval. "Was he good?" he asked. Hand grinned: Yes. Denis said he'd love to come to America, see basketball, see his cousin, who lived in New Mexico. I told him New Mexico was very pretty. "*Très bien*," I said.

"But," said Hand, still on the Bulls, "Pippen is the more elegant player."

Hand said this all the time, partly, surely, because it enraged anyone in Chicago who heard it.

Denis shook his head and smiled. He didn't agree but kept mum.

We didn't know if we would give them money. We got in the car and debated. They hadn't asked, but it seemed they knew the possibility existed, that we could spare it. I still had some American hundreds in my shoes, but would that spoil everything? Would we pollute something pure—a simple game between travellers and hosts—by afterward throwing money at them? But maybe they did expect money. Maybe this was a common occurrence: Americans pull up, grab the ball, show them what's what, drop cash, and head back to the Saly hotels—

"Let's not," Hand said.

"O.K." The boys surrounded us, waving. We began to drive back to the highway, as the boys went their separate ways. I stopped the car, alongside Denis, the Bulls fan who wanted to go to New Mexico.

I rolled down my window and said, "Hey," to the boy. He approached the window. I reached into my sock and grabbed what I could. I handed him three hundred dollars in three American bills.

"See you in Chicago," I said.

The boy thanked us. "If I get to Chicago, it is because of you," he said.

"See you there," Hand said to Denis. To me: "We should get going."

We said goodbye to Denis, and his eyes were liquid with feeling, and we loved him, but there was a man in our back seat.

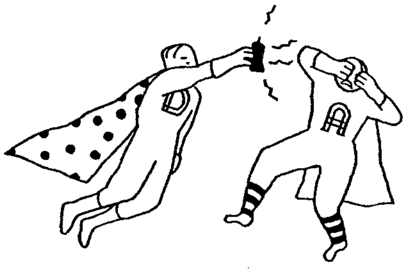
"This is my brother," said Denis. "He needs a ride to Mbuu."

I looked at Hand. Denis's brother was in the car, and it was too late; we had no choice. Mbuu was on our way. We said hello to Denis's brother. His name was Pierre.

His chatter was never-ending. Mbuu was twenty minutes away, and Pierre did not stop talking. Denis's brother had seen his brother's receipt of cash, and wanted some of his own.

Pierre used Abass's line, that he needed cab fare to get back. Hand explained his demands to me. We laughed.

The man began talking again, but he had changed tacks: now he needed the money to go to Zaire.



He and Hand barked back and forth for a while, making little headway. When Hand had talked him away from the Zaire plan, the brother became hungry. He thrust his palm between us.

"We have any food?" Hand asked me. From my backpack, I produced a granola bar. The brother accepted it, didn't open it, and did not stop talking; he was a machine. We were approaching Mbuu, and he was getting desperate.

"Jesus," I said, "is there any way we can ask him to stop talking?"

We were in Mbuu, a dark adobe village. There were no constant lines—everything was moving. The walls were moving, they were human. There were people everywhere, and everyone was shifting. The homes were open storefronts. Our headlights flashed over hundreds of people, walking, watching TV—large groups or families visible through glassless windows, all in the open-air storefronts, eating their dinners, drinking at a streetside bar, everyone so close.

We stopped and said goodbye to Denis's brother. He paused in the car, waiting. We stared at him. His eyes spoke.

—You owe me.

—We don't.

—This is wrong.

—It's not wrong.

—You're not sure. You're confused.

—Yes, I am confused.

—It's all wrong.

—I agree.

He stepped out and closed the door. We got back on the road.

"I don't feel bad about that," Hand said.

"I hated that fucker."

And nothing else in the world had changed.

The next day, we woke up early to get back to and out of Dakar at noon. We'd left Chicago forty-eight hours ago. The road was clear for us, and Hand swung the radio volume right and we were delirious.

We sped through the savanna and suburbs and made it to the airport by eleven. At the Air Afrique desk, the three stunning queens, in blue and yellow and green, wanted four hundred dollars each, in cash, for the tickets to

Casablanca, so I put my name on more traveller's checks at the money-change desk—me! me! swoop! swoop!—and came back and presented the money, two inches thick, to the eldest of the three women.

"Ah, so you the big boss?" she asked.

"The what?" I said.

"The big boss! You!" she repeated.

"Yes, the big boss, this one!" said another of the women.

"But it was you who wanted cash," I said. I was confused. I didn't want to be the big boss.

"Some man beat the big boss," said the third.

Then they all laughed. For a long time. I wondered if they hazed everyone like this. These women were cruel. I looked at Hand. His eyes were alight with something else.

"Ladies," said Hand, "do women like you ever date people like us? What would it take?"

"What?" the senior one said.

Hand tried it again in French. They all laughed. This one just knocked them out. Now we were both shamed. These three were something. I left as they continued to cackle; Hand joined me soon after, chin on his chest.

We had three hours in the air. Morocco we'd do better. We'd meet more people, quicker. Our car would go faster. We'd do more in a day than we'd done in Senegal and we'd get out of there and on to Mongolia within twenty-four hours. We'd learned and we would not waste the time again. I went to sleep and woke up when the pilot was urging us to put our seat belts on again. We descended into Morocco. Which was green. As far as we could see, from the air, it was green.

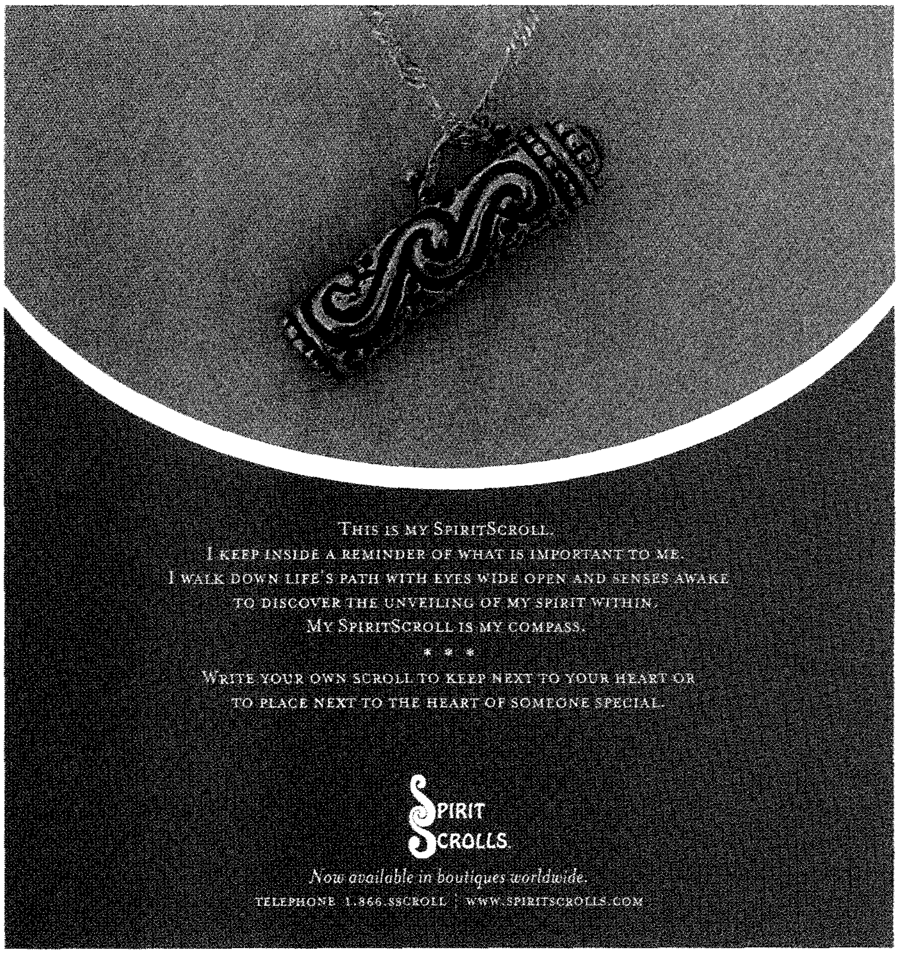
"Isn't this a desert—the whole country?" Hand asked, leaning over the aisle and toward me. Everywhere below, squares of farmland stitched together with orange thread. Already we knew nothing we thought we knew. And as we got closer to the earth, it bore less and less resemblance to anything we'd expected.

"I thought desert, too," I said.

"We got it backwards. Or they did. Senegal should be green. Morocco brown."

"It's gorgeous down there," Hand said.

"Christ. It really is." ♦



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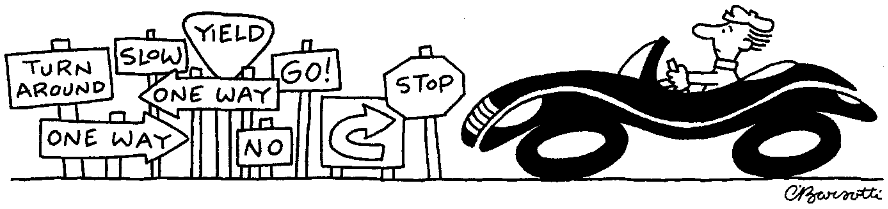


BOOKS

POLITICAL HEAT

The great Chicago heat wave, and other unnatural disasters.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

In the first week of July, 1995, a strong high-pressure air mass developed over the plains of the Southwest and began moving slowly eastward toward Chicago. Illinois usually gets its warm summer air from the Gulf of Mexico, and the air coming off the ocean is relatively temperate. But this was a blast of western air that had been baked in the desert ovens of West Texas and New Mexico. It was hot, bringing temperatures in excess of a hundred degrees, and, because the preceding two months had been very wet in the Midwest and the ground was damp, the air steadily picked up moisture as it moved across the farmlands east of the Rockies. Ordinarily, this would not have been a problem, since humid air tends to become diluted as it mixes with the drier air higher up in the atmosphere. But it was Chicago's misfortune, in mid-July, to be in the grip of an unusually strong temperature inversion: the air in the first thousand feet above the city surface was cooler than the air at two and three thousand feet. The humid air could not rise and be diluted. It was trapped by the warmer air above. The United States has cities that are often humid—like Houston and New Orleans—without being tremendously hot. And it has very hot cities—like Las Vegas and Phoenix—that are almost never humid. But for one long week, beginning on Thursday, July 13, 1995, Chicago was both. Meteorologists measure humidity with what is called the dew point—the point at which the air is so saturated with moisture that it cannot cool without forming dew. On a typical Chicago summer day, the dew point is in the low sixties, and on a very warm, humid day it is in the low seventies. At Chicago's Midway Airport, during the heat wave of 1995, the dew point hit the low eighties—a figure reached regularly only in places like the coastal regions of the Middle East. In July of 1995, Chicago effectively turned into Dubai.

As the air mass settled on the city, cars began to overheat and stall in the streets. Roads buckled. Hundreds of children developed heat exhaustion when school buses were stuck in traffic. More than three thousand fire hydrants were opened in poorer neighborhoods around the city, by people looking for relief from the heat, and this caused pressure to drop so precipitately that entire buildings were left without water. So many air-conditioners were turned on that the city's electrical infrastructure was overwhelmed. A series of rolling blackouts left thousands without power. As the heat took its toll, the city ran out of ambulances. More than twenty hospitals, mostly on Chicago's poorer South Side, shut their doors to new admissions. Callers to 911 were put on hold, and as the police and paramedics raced from one home to another it became clear that the heat was killing people in unprecedented numbers. The police took the bodies to the Cook County Medical Examiner's office, and a line of cruisers stretched outside the building. Students from a nearby mortuary school, and then ex-convicts looking to earn probation points, were brought in to help. The morgue ran out of bays in which to put the bodies. Office space was cleared. It wasn't enough. The owner of a local meat-packing firm offered the city his refrigerated trucks to help store the bodies. The first set wasn't enough. He sent another. It wasn't enough. In the end, there were nine forty-eight-foot meatpacking trailers in the morgue's parking lot. When the final statistics were tallied, the city calculated that in the seven days between July 14th and July 20th, the heat wave had resulted in the deaths of seven hundred and thirty-nine Chicagoans; on Saturday, July 15th, alone, three hundred and sixty-five people died from the heat. The chance intersection of a strong high-pressure ridge, a wet spring, and an intense temperature inversion claimed more lives than Hurricane Andrew, the crash of T.W.A. Flight 800, the Oklahoma City bombing, and the Northridge, California, earthquake combined.

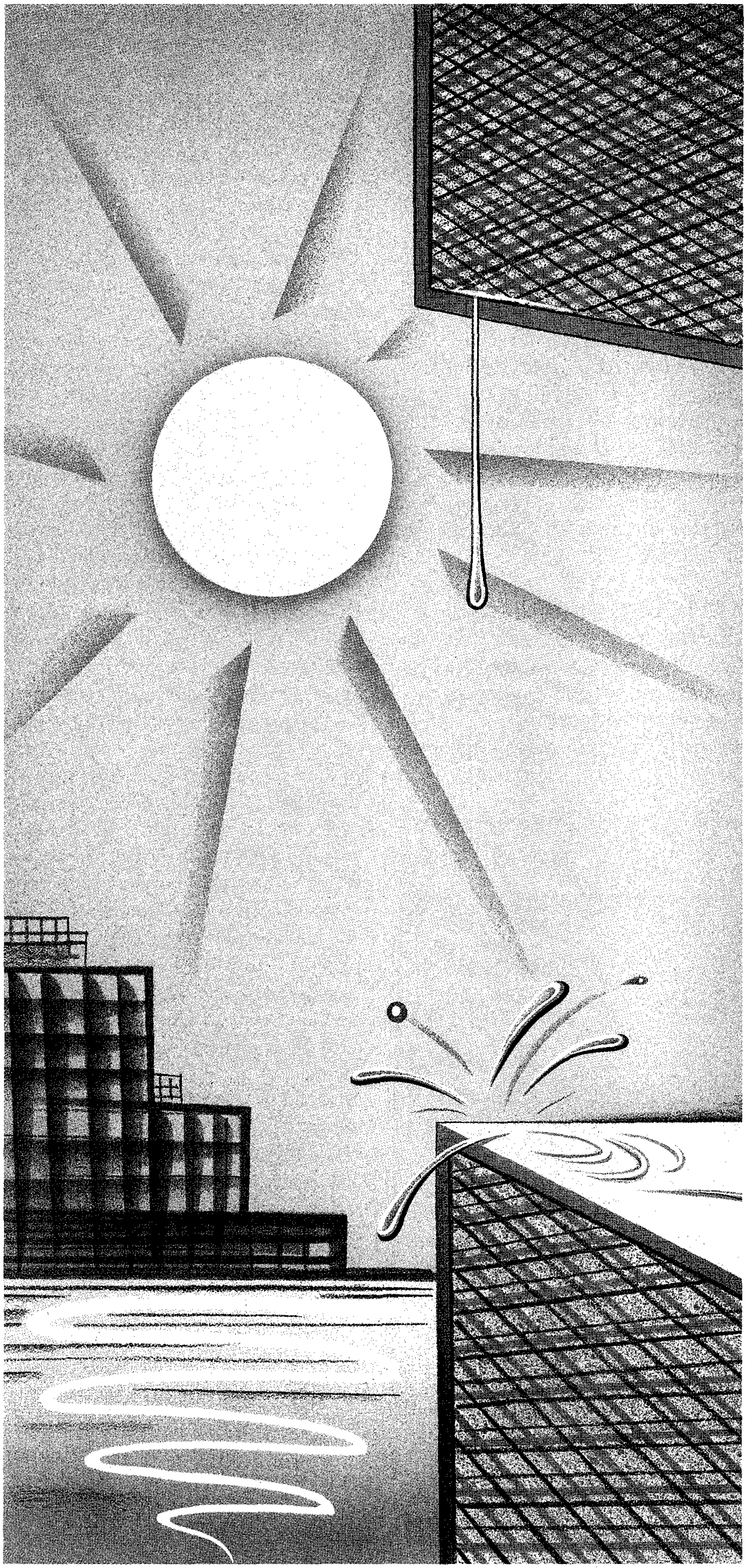
In "Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago" (Chicago; $27.50), the New York University sociologist Eric Klinenberg sets out to understand what happened during those seven days in July. He looks at who died, and where they died, and why they died. He goes to the county morgue and sifts through the dozens of boxes of unclaimed personal effects of heat-wave victims—"watches, wallets, letters, tax returns, photographs, and record books"—and reads the police reports on the victims, with their dry recitations of the circumstances of death. Here is one for a seventy-three-year-old white woman who was found on Monday, July 17th:

> A recluse for 10 yrs, never left apartment, found today by son, apparently DOA. Conditions in apartment when R/O's [responding officers] arrived thermostat was registering over 90 degrees f. with no air circulation except for windows opened by son (after death).

Here is another, for a seventy-nine-year-old black man found on Wednesday the 19th:

> Victim did not respond to phone calls or knocks on victim's door since Sunday, 16 July 1995. Victim was known as quiet,

ROBERT RISKO



More than seven hundred people died in the heat wave. Were these deaths preventable?

[kept] to himself and at times, not to answer the door. Landlord . . . does not have any information to any relatives to victim. . . . Chain was on door. R/O was able to see victim on sofa with flies on victim and a very strong odor decay.

The city's response to the crisis, Klinenberg argues, was to look at people like those two victims—the recluse who did not open her windows and the man who would not answer his door—and conclude that their deaths were inevitable, the result of an unavoidable collision between their own infirmity and an extreme environmental event. As one Health Department official put it at the time, "Government can't guarantee there won't be a heat wave." On the Friday, the human-services commissioner, Daniel Alvarez, told the press, "We're talking about people who die because they neglect themselves. We did everything possible. But some people didn't want to open their doors to us." In its official postmortem four months later, the city sounded the same fatalistic note: the disaster had been a "unique meteorological event" that proved that the "government alone cannot do it all."

Klinenberg finds that conclusion unacceptably superficial. The disaster may look inevitable, but beneath the surface he sees numerous explanations for why it took the shape it did. One chapter of the book is devoted to a comparison of two adjoining low-income neighborhoods in Chicago, Little Village and North Lawndale. Statistically, the two are almost identical, each with heavy concentrations of poor, elderly people living alone, so it would seem that the heat wave should have taken a similar toll in both neighborhoods. But North Lawndale had ten times the fatality rate of Little Village. Why? Because Little Village is a bustling, relatively safe, close-knit Hispanic community; the elderly had family and friends nearby who could look in on them, and streets and stores where they could go to escape their stifling apartments. North Lawndale, by contrast, is a sprawling, underpopulated, drug-infested neighborhood. The elderly there were afraid to go outside, and had no one close by to visit them. The heat was deadly only in combination with particular social and physical circumstances.

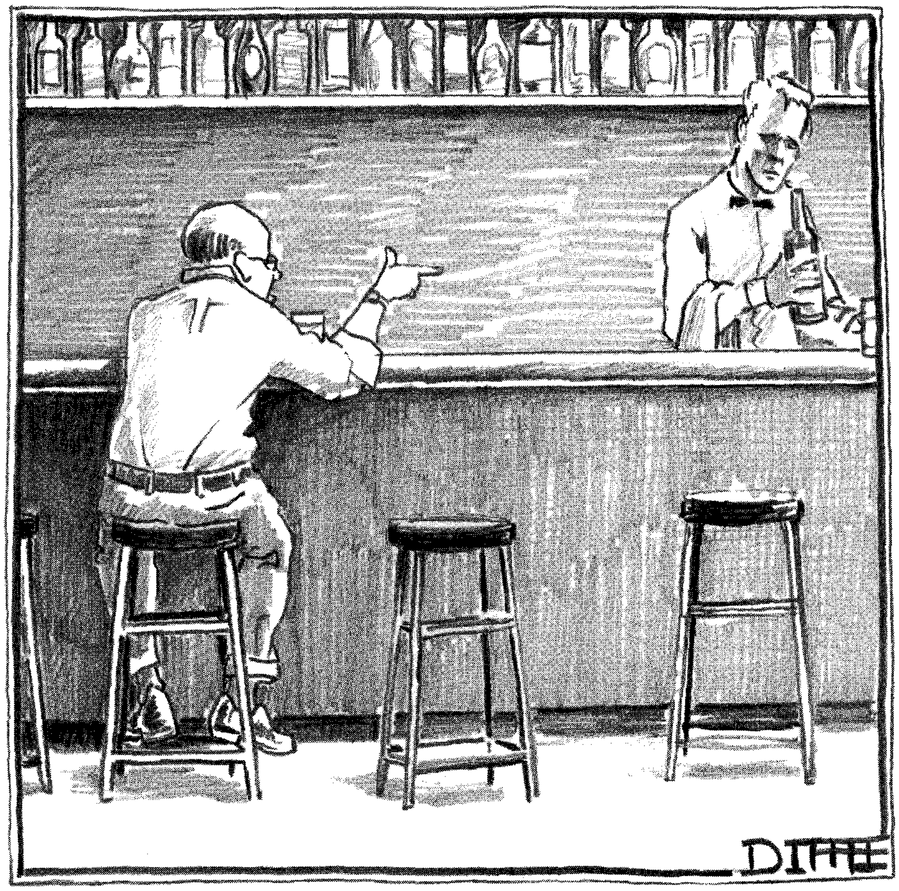
Klinenberg takes an equally close look at the city's ambulance shortage. The city could have nearly tripled the number of available ambulances by calling in reserves from the suburbs, but it was slow to realize that it had a disaster on its hands. "It's hot. It's very hot. But let's not blow it out of proportion": this was Mayor Richard Daley's assessment of the situation on Friday, July 14th. The streamlining of city governments like Chicago's, Klinenberg explains, isolated city officials. Social-services departments had been professionalized as if they were corporations. Responsibilities had been outsourced. "Police officers replace aldermen and precinct captains as the community sentries," he writes, and as a result political organizations began to lose contact with the needs of their constituents.

Problem solving, in our day and age, brings with it the requirement of compression: we are urged to distill the most pertinent lessons from any experience. Klinenberg suggests that such distillation only obscures the truth, and by the end of "Heat Wave" he has traced the lines of culpability in dozens of directions, drawing a dense and subtle portrait of exactly what happened during that week in July. It is an approach that resembles, most of all, the way the heat wave was analyzed by meteorologists. They took hourly surface-airways observations of temperature, wind speed, and humidity, estimated radiation from cloud cover, and performed complex calculations using the Penman-Monteith formula to factor in soil-heat flux, latent heat of vaporization, stomatal resistance, and the von Kármán constant. Why, Klinenberg asks, can't we bring the same rigor to our study of the *social* causes of disaster?

Take the question of air-conditioning. The Centers for Disease Control, in their Chicago investigation, concluded that the use of air-conditioners could have prevented more than half of the deaths. But many low-income people in Chicago couldn't afford to turn on an air-conditioner even if they had been given one for free. Many of those who did have air-conditioners, meanwhile, were hit by the power failures that week. Chicago had a problem with a vulnerable population: a lot of very old and very sick people. But it also, quite apart from this, had an air-conditioning problem. What was the cause of that problem?

As it turns out, this is a particularly timely question, since there is a debate going on now in Washington over air-conditioners which bears directly on what happens during heat waves. All air-conditioners consist of a motor and a long coil that acts as a heat exchanger, taking hot air out of the room and replacing it with cold air. If you use a relatively unsophisticated motor and a small coil, an air-conditioner will be cheap to make but will use a lot of electricity. If you use a better motor and a larger heat exchanger, the air-conditioner will cost more to buy but far less to run. Rationally, consumers should buy the more expensive, energy-efficient units, because their slightly higher purchase price is dwarfed by the amount of money the owner pays over time in electric bills. But fifteen years ago Congress realized that this wasn't happening. The people who generally bought air-conditioners—builders and landlords—weren't the people who paid the utility bills to run them. Their incentive was to buy the cheapest unit. So Congress passed a minimum standard for air-conditioning efficiency. Residential central air-conditioning units now had to score at least 10 on a scale known as SEER—the seasonal energy-efficiency ratio. One of Bill Clinton's last acts as President was to raise that standard to 13. This spring, however, the Bush Administration cut the efficiency increase by a third, making SEER 12 the law.

It should be said that SEER 13 is no more technologically difficult than SEER 12. SEER 12 is simply a bit cheaper to make, and SEER 13 is simply cheaper to operate. Nor is this a classic regulatory battle that pits corporate against consumer interests. The nation's largest air-conditioner manufacturer, Carrier, is in favor of 12. But the second-largest manufacturer, Goodman (which makes Amana air-conditioners), is in favor of

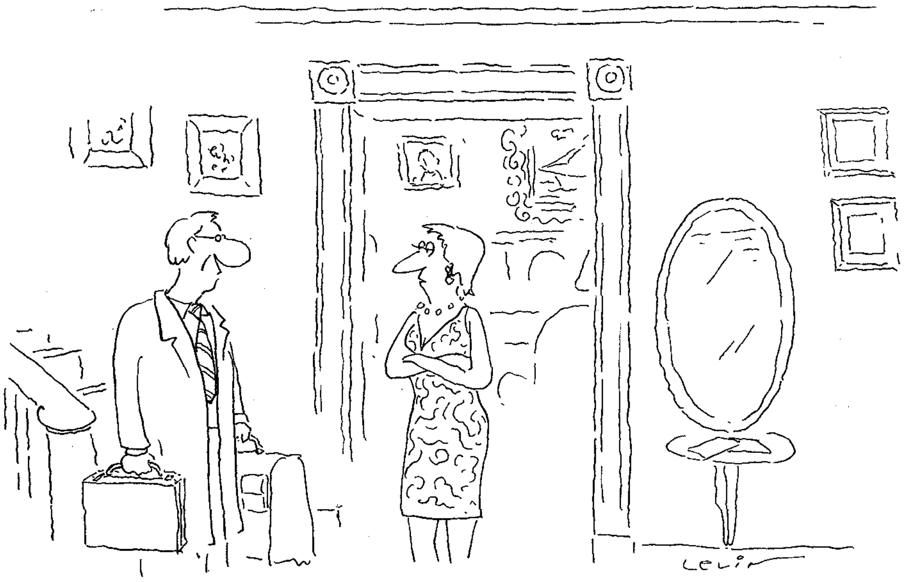


"I'm a big fan of your work."

13. The Bush decision is really about politics, and the White House felt free to roll back the Clinton standard because most of the time the difference between the two standards is negligible. There is one exception, however: heat waves.

Air-conditioning is, of course, the reason that electrical consumption soars on very hot days. On the worst day in August, electricity consumption in, say, Manhattan might be three or four times what it is on a cool spring day. For most of the year, a local utility can use the electricity from its own power plants, or sign stable, long-term contracts with other power companies. But the extra electricity a city needs on that handful of very hot days presents a problem. You can't build a power plant just to supply this surge—what would you do with it during the rest of the year? So, at peak periods, utilities buy the power they need on the "spot" market, and power bought on the spot market can cost fifty times as much as the power used on normal days. The amount of power that a utility has to buy for that handful of hot days every summer, in other words, is a huge factor in the size of our electric bills.

For anyone wanting to make electricity cheaper, then, the crucial issue is not how to reduce average electrical consumption but how to reduce peak consumption. A recent study estimates that moving the SEER standard from 10 to 13 would have the effect of cutting peak demand by the equivalent of more than a hundred and fifty power plants. The Bush Administration's decision to cut the SEER upgrade by a third means that by 2020 demand will be fourteen thousand megawatts higher than it would have been, and that we'll have to build about fifty more power plants. The cost of those extra power plants—and of running a less efficient air-conditioner on hot days—is part of what will make air-conditioning less affordable for people who will someday desperately need it.



"After you've finished discussions with our allies, we have to talk."

• •

The sheer volume of electricity required on a very hot day also puts enormous strain on a city's power-distribution system. On the Friday of the Chicago heat wave, when power demand peaked, one of the main problem areas was the transmission substation (TSS) at California Avenue and Addison Street, in the city's northwest corner. TSS 114 consists of a series of giant transformers—twenty feet high and fifteen feet across—that help convert the high-voltage electricity that comes into Chicago along power lines into the low-voltage power that is used in offices and homes. Throughout that Friday afternoon, the four transformers in the second terminal at TSS 114 were running at a hundred and eighteen per cent of capacity—that is, they were handling roughly a fifth more electricity than they were designed to carry. The chief side effect of overcapacity is heat. The more current you run through a transformer the hotter it gets, and, combined with the ambient temperature that afternoon, which averaged a hundred and eleven degrees, the heat turned the inside of terminal two into an oven.

At 4:56 P.M., the heat overwhelmed a monitoring device known as a CT—a gauge almost small enough to fit in the palm of one's hand—on the first of the transformers. It tripped and shut down. The current that had been shared by four transformers had to be carried by just three, making them still hotter. The second transformer was now carrying a hundred and twenty-four per cent of its rated capacity. Fifty-one minutes later, a circuit breaker on the second transformer burst into flames. Transformers are engineered to handle extra loads for short periods of time, but there was just a little too much current and a little too much heat. At 6:19, two more CTs tripped on the third transformer and, as workmen struggled to get the terminal up and running, a CT failed on the fourth transformer. In all, forty-nine thousand customers and all of the people in those customers' houses and apartments and offices were without air-conditioning for close to twenty hours—and this is merely what happened at TSS 114.

All around the city that week, between Wednesday and Sunday, there were 1,327 separate equipment failures that left an additional hundred and forty-nine thousand customers without power. Those are staggering numbers. But what is really staggering is how easy it would have been to avoid these power outages. Commonwealth Edison, the city's utility, had forecast a year earlier that electricity use in the summer of 1995 would peak at 18,600 megawatts. The actual high, on the Friday of the heat wave, was 19,201. The difference, in other words, between the demand that the utility was prepared to handle and the demand that brought the city to its knees was six hundred and one megawatts, or 3.2 per cent of the total—

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which is just about what a place like Chicago might save by having a city full of SEER 13 air-conditioners instead of SEER 12 air-conditioners.

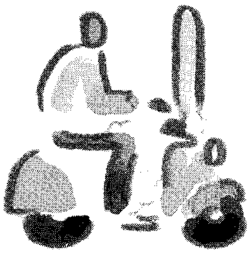
In 1928, a storm near Palm Beach, Florida, killed almost two thousand people, most of them black migrant workers on the shores of Lake Okeechobee. This was, the state comptroller declared, "an act of God." In 1935, the most severe hurricane in American history hit the Florida Keys, sending a storm surge fifteen to twenty feet high through a low-lying encampment of war veterans working on the highway. About four hundred people died. "The catastrophe must be characterized as an act of God and was by its very nature beyond the power of man," the Veterans Authority and Federal Emergency Relief Administration declared in an official report. In 1972, an earthen dam put up by a mining company in Logan County, West Virginia, collapsed in heavy rains, killing a hundred and thirty-nine people. It was an "act of God," a mining-company official said, disavowing any culpability. In 1974, a series of twisters swept across ten states, killing three hundred and fifteen people. Senator Thomas Eagleton, of Missouri, said at the time that his colleagues in Washington viewed the tornado "as an act of God where even the Congress can't intervene," explaining why the government would not fund an early-warning system. This is the way we have thought of catastrophes in the United States. The idea of an "act of God" suggests that any search for causes is unnecessary. It encourages us to see disasters, as the environmental historian Ted Steinberg writes in "Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America" (2000), simply as things that happen "from time to time." It suggests, too, that systems or institutions ought to be judged on the basis of how they perform most of the time, under "normal" conditions, rather than by how they perform under those rare moments of extreme stress. But this idea, as "Heat Wave" makes clear, is a grave mistake. Political systems and social institutions ought to be judged the way utilities are judged. The true test is how they perform on a blistering day in July.

Klinenberg tells the story of Pauline Jankowitz, an elderly woman living alone in a third-floor apartment in a transitional neighborhood. Her air-conditioner was old and didn't work well. She had a bladder problem that left her incontinent, and she had to walk with a crutch because she had a weak leg. That made it difficult for her to get down the stairs, and once she was outside she was terrified of being mugged. "Chicago is just a shooting gallery," she said to Klinenberg. She left her apartment only about six times a year. Jankowitz was the prototypical heat-wave victim, and, as she told Klinenberg, that week in July was "the closest I've ever come to death." But she survived. A friend had told her to leave her apartment if it got too hot; so, early on what would turn out to be the worst of the seven days, she rose and crept down the stairs. She caught a city bus to a nearby store, which was air-conditioned, and there she bought fresh cherries and leaned on the shopping cart until she recovered her strength. On the trip home, she recalled, "climbing the stairs was almost impossible." Back in her apartment, she felt her body begin to swell and go numb. She telephoned a friend. She turned a fan on high, lay down on the floor, covered herself with wet towels, and dreamed that she was on a Caribbean cruise. She was poor and old and infirm, but she lived, and one of the many lessons of her story is that in order to survive that week in July she suddenly depended on services and supports that previously she had barely needed at all. Her old air-conditioner was useless most of the time. But that week it helped to keep her apartment at least habitable. She rarely travelled. But on that day the fact that there was a city bus, and that it came promptly and that it was air-conditioned, was of the greatest importance. She rarely went to the store; she had her groceries delivered. But now the proximity of a supermarket, where she could lean on the shopping cart and breathe in the cool air, was critical. Pauline Jankowitz's life depended not on the ordinary workings of the social institutions in her world but on their ability to perform at one critical moment of peak demand. On the hottest of all days, her neighborhood substation did not fail. Her bus came. Her grocery store was open. She was one of the lucky ones. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

I., *by Stephen Dixon (McSweeney's; $18).* Reading this novel made up of interlinked stories can feel like being trapped in a small room with someone who insists on telling you every damn thing that crosses his mind. I., the hero, is an older writer stuck in a life that seems increasingly hard to endure: his wife is chronically ill, his two daughters find him difficult at best, and he is often gripped by an unfocussed and uncontrollable anger. But from this grim material emerges a moving and oddly funny book, as I. takes refuge in reveries of the past, recounting stories of Thanksgiving Day parades, meals in Paris, family quarrels, and the courtship of his wife. He also imagines myriad scenarios that might have happened but didn't; these unlived possibilities underscore the contingency of even our deepest relationships, and the ways in which we can be haunted by the alternatives.

Westchester Burning: Portrait of a Marriage, *by Amine Wefali (Dial; $23.95).* Amine Wefali and her husband, Phillip, an investment banker, had four children, a weakness for pricey real estate (and, as it turned out, infidelity), and a rickety marriage that was thirty years old when it finally collapsed. There's so little communion on record here between husband and wife, however, that this searing memoir is less a picture of love lost than a harrowing illustration of how marriage, as an institution, can amount to a public version of solitary confinement. Wefali spares no one in this indelible account (with the possible exception of her ornery Russian mother), and her singular voice—haunted, angry, and passionate—recalls Shirley Jackson's.



Cogito, Ergo Sum: The Life of René Descartes, *by Richard Watson (Godine; $35).* Probably the strangest biography of the year, this volume is the product of more than forty years of obsession by Watson, a professor of philosophy at Washington University, in St. Louis. He is less interested in the revered philosopher and mathematician than in the diminutive, arrogant Frenchman who fathered a child out of wedlock, probably dabbled in drugs, and practiced vivisection on animals (which Descartes considered machines without souls). Unearthing the real Descartes took some spadework—much of the misinformation about him was popularized by the famous 1691 biography by Adrien Baillet—and Watson isn't shy about playing up his own achievements as a researcher. This excessively colloquial, willfully eccentric book is as infuriating as it is entertaining, right down to the index, which includes such entries as "Pop a pill, 326" (this particular citation points to an aside of Watson's about how modern readers deal with anxiety).

The Rider, *by Tim Krabbé, translated from the Dutch by Sam Garrett (Bloomsbury; $19.95).* At the start of this chronicle of a single bike race, the author glances up from his gear to assess the crowd of spectators. "Non-racers," he writes. "The emptiness of those lives shocks me." In immediate, living prose, Krabbé, a novelist as well as a cyclist, takes us with him, inch by inch, as he rides the hundred-and-thirty-seven-kilometre Tour de Mont Aigoual, a course through the mountains that is better known as one of the cruellest stages of the Tour de France. He imagines an official collecting his clothes "after I've died in the race"; recalls a champion cyclist who suffocated to death while climbing one particularly nasty hill; and insists that "being a good loser is a despicable evasion." Along the way, he lays bare the athlete's peculiar mixture of arrogance and terror, viciousness and camaraderie, and the result is one of the more convincing love stories of recent memory.

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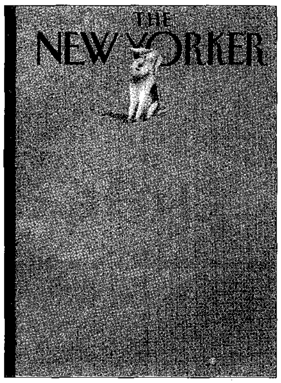

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

FIELD TRIP

M. Night Shyamalan's "Signs."

BY ANTHONY LANE

This is only a stab in the dark, but could it be that M. Night Shyamalan—the maker of "The Sixth Sense" and "Unbreakable"—harbors, in the depths of his heart, the ambition to be an auteur? I only wonder because the opening credits of his latest film, "Signs," which is about crop circles and alien invasion, rise to a fine triple whammy: "Written, produced, and directed by M. Night Shyamalan." The movie, incidentally, is set in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, which happens to be where he lives, and there is a cameo by one M. Night Shyamalan. I take it for granted that he made the crop circles himself, using a long rope, a pair of compasses, and an elephant on a tea tray, and none of us should be amazed if he turned out to have donned a verdigris catsuit and slipped into the role of the Thing from outer space.

In short, this is a Shyamalan project. It boasts the peculiar strain of anxiety that he has cultivated with such delicate, if sadistic, care over the last few years. His films are greenhouses, where the air is hung with a brew of unsettling aromas. Only rarely do fearful things jump out at you, preferring to grow and writhe at their own pace. There is shock, but no surprise, as if each unwelcome visitation, like the benign force that counters it, were long since written—or, in the case of "Signs," mapped out as a battle plan—in the stars. In what instantly wins my vote for the creepiest line yet delivered this century, someone on the radio points out that the folk from beyond haven't travelled all this way for our nice, juicy planet: "They've come to harvest *us*."

The image is apt; if mankind is indeed going to be plucked, husked, grilled over a slow flame and served with melted butter, then the deed might as well be done by Jolly Green Giants. (For anyone who has paused during a reading of "Ode to a Nightingale" and mused upon the line "She stood in tears amid the alien corn," here's your answer. As for Keats's so-called "early death," well, I think we know what *that* means.) This is particularly bad news for Graham Hess (Mel Gibson), who grows corn on an isolated farm that he shares with his daughter, Bo (Abigail Breslin), her older brother, Morgan (Rory Culkin), and a guy called Merrill (Joaquin Phoenix). It is typical of the director, who releases information as if it were being squeezed out of him under duress, that only after a while do we realize that Merrill is Graham's brother, that Graham is a widower, and that he used to be a priest. Is Shyamalan thumbing his nose at the studios' desire for instant back story, for characters who can be read as swiftly as the back page of a newspaper, or is he implying that everything about a person, even the most blameless of facts, can have the sticky tenacity of a secret?

We begin in Graham's cornfield, or, rather, in the large trampled area where the corn used to stand. He is skeptical about the patterns, as is the local police officer, Caroline Paski (Cherry Jones), but everybody else seems ready to be spooked. Even the warm, toasted colors in which Shyamalan frames the landscape—so different from the bleak dejection of "The Sixth Sense," where the entire picture took its tonal cue from Bruce Willis's raincoat—are invested with a tinge of the ominous. Parts of the movie are as rich to gaze upon as a dinner table at Thanksgiving; all the

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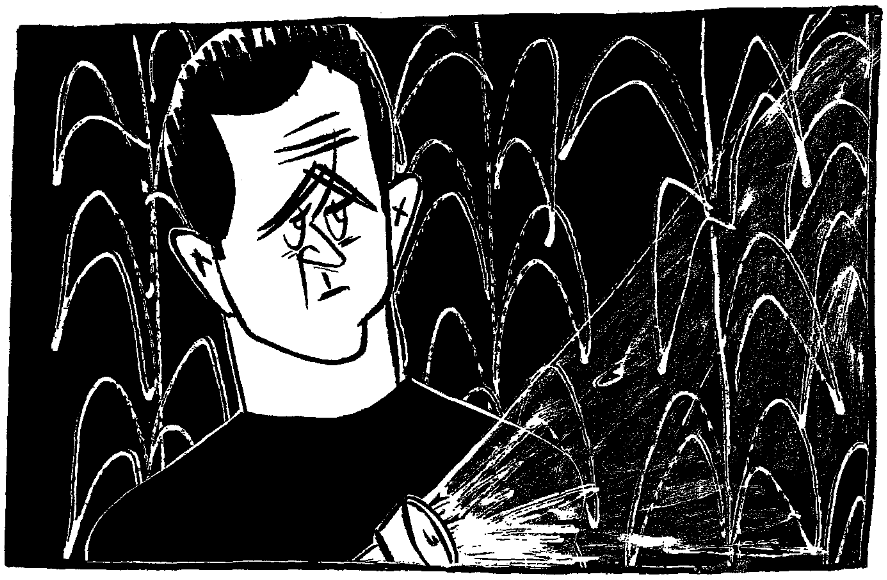
more reason to ask ourselves who, exactly, will be doing the feasting. For a while, nothing much happens, and, after the nerve-tight strings of the opening score, which James Newton Howard presumably intended as a tribute to Bernard Herrmann, we realize that Shyamalan prefers to make music out of ordinary knocks and cries: the scrape of a dog bowl along the ground, or the dog itself barking with such startling violence that, whatever popular wisdom tells us, we just know its bite will be worse. Meanwhile, the family's old baby monitor is starting to fizz with overheard babble. The weird thing is, there are no babies in the house.

Beneath all this, there runs a lurking comedy. The brothers hear noises and, blaming local troublemakers, arrange to bawl them out; when Graham admits that he is hopeless at cursing, Merrill tells him to go insane with rage, whereupon Graham runs around the outside of the house shouting, "I'm insane with rage," which is almost too bizarre to be funny. Then there is Morgan, who fashions conical hats of aluminum foil, "so the aliens can't read our minds." And what of the placid Bo, who reads the runes of impending crisis with the perilous calm of the innocent? "There's a monster outside my room. Can I have a glass of water?" she asks her dad. For one thing, pay attention to that water; like nearly every insignificant detail in the film, it will turn significant with a vengeance, and, for those of long memory, with a nod to "The Day of the Triffids." There is no doubt that Bo and Morgan mark the resurrection of serious fright in Shyamalan's work. "The Sixth Sense" had Haley Joel Osment, "Unbreakable" was comparatively childless and therefore low on emotional pressure, and now the kids are back, bringing with them the dreadful doubleness of youth: lacking a layer of tough adult skin, they are able to perceive, even prophesy, the threat of the uncanny a long way off, but they are also liable to smart and suffer far more than the rest of us when it turns up.

And it does turn up, although at first we see hardly anything—only a trailing leg as it vanishes into the corn, green on green, out of the corner of our eye. "Signs" is calculated to rebuff the Spielberg formula: no mother ship, no mother, and no question that what descends to Earth will be bearing something other than a gospel of intergalactic solidarity. There are lights in the sky, but we catch them only on TV, as everybody clusters around to watch the planet in trouble. The crop circles, it emerges, were some form of landing strip, and Graham's farm is thus a designated arrivals hall, where the aliens will come to collect their luggage and whine about the in-flight meal. The result is taut, economical, never quite free of the ridiculous, and laudably short on special effects, like an alien's answer to "Assault on Precinct 13." The one effect that we do get is a single invader, a straggler from the pack, who makes his—or its—entrance at a suitably unguarded moment. I will not supply particulars, save to point out that it holds up its human victim in a grotesque parody of a Pietà. Worse still, the Thing doesn't scream, snarl, or sprout a dozen tongues; instead, it merely makes a *clicking sound*, like a mother hen, or someone trying to soothe a fretful horse.

I have to confess that this put the fear of God in me, or, at any rate, the fear of large-scale cereal farming and its possible consequences. To devise an outsider, however cheaply made up, who prepares to inflict harm upon mankind by going through the traditional motions of love—of parental love, moreover—is an inspiringly fiendish touch. Shyamalan seems to have a monopoly on this process just now; he often tries too hard, but nobody else can conjure such a sudden flood of worry, or summon so unmistakable a stink of evil, and you come out of "Signs," as you did from "The Sixth Sense," in severe need of loud music, bad jokes, and drinks with cherries and umbrellas in them—anything to waft away the fug of unease.

If the new film lacks the punch of that early success, it's because Shyamalan is already becoming tired of his own conventions, and keen to stretch his skills into areas where they don't belong. I am thinking of the way in which, at the picture's peak, we stall and flash back to the death of Graham's wife. If this is meant to annoy the sixteen-year-olds in the audience, who want their horrors served up in the proper order, then I'm all for it; unfortunately, what Shyamalan is doing, with unbecoming heaviness, is forcing his religious plot to peak at the same time. Graham lost his faith when his wife died; has his chance to retrieve it now come? And do we care, given that a tall, thin bogeyman the color of creamed spinach is hanging out in his living room and that nobody has yet given it a cup of coffee? There is a spiritual patness, as it were, a tying up of the soul's loose ends, that can be twice as vulgar as its narrative equivalent; look at the very last scene of "Signs," and you will see what I mean. Still, there is much to relish in this invasion of the body snatchers, not least the memorable sight of Joaquin Phoenix watching the invasion unfold and saying, hoarse with awe, "The nerds were right." Help. ♦

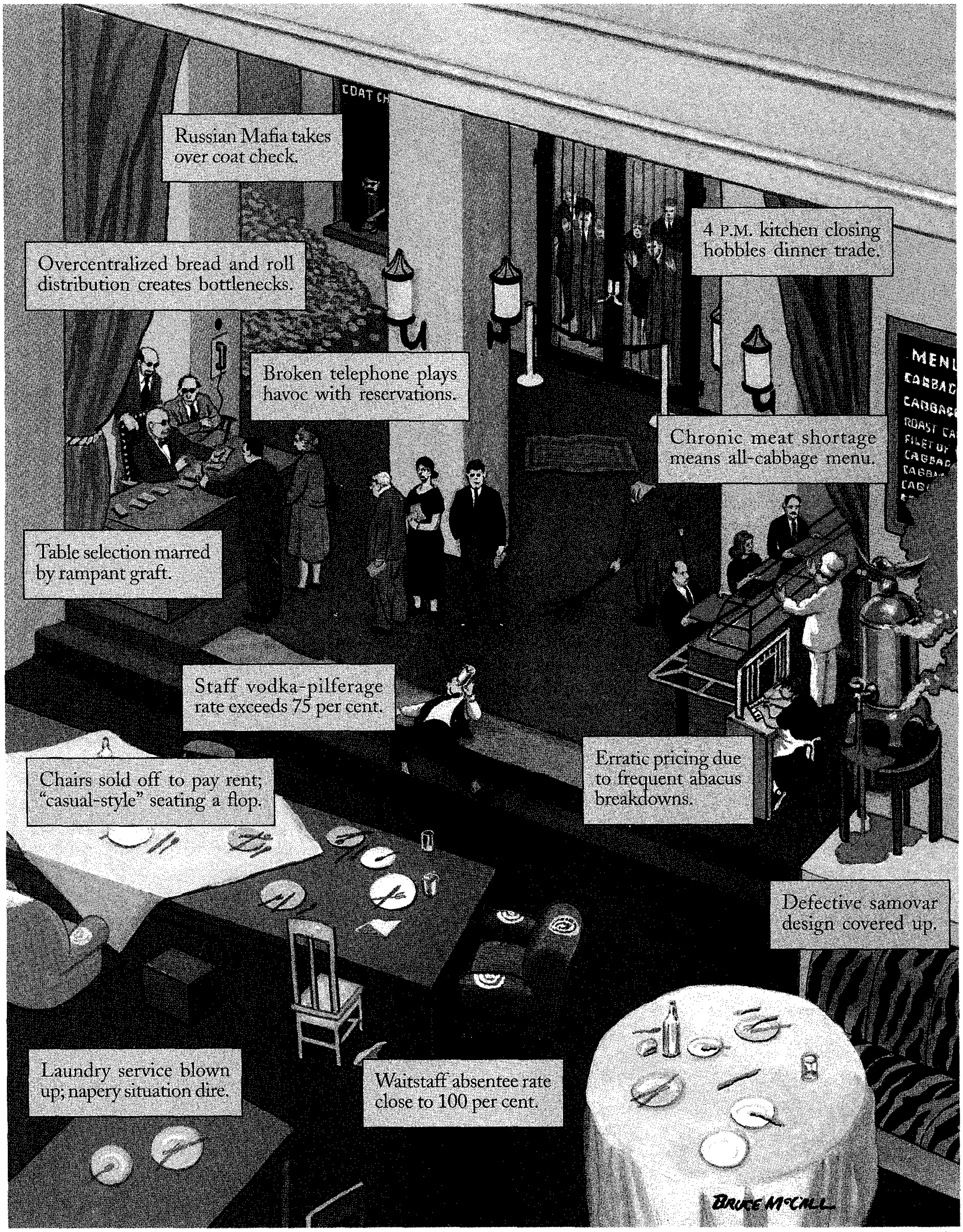


Mel Gibson plays Graham Hess, a farmer with infested cornfields.

TOM BACHTELL

THE BACK PAGE BY BRUCE McCALL

THE COLLAPSE OF THE RUSSIAN TEA ROOM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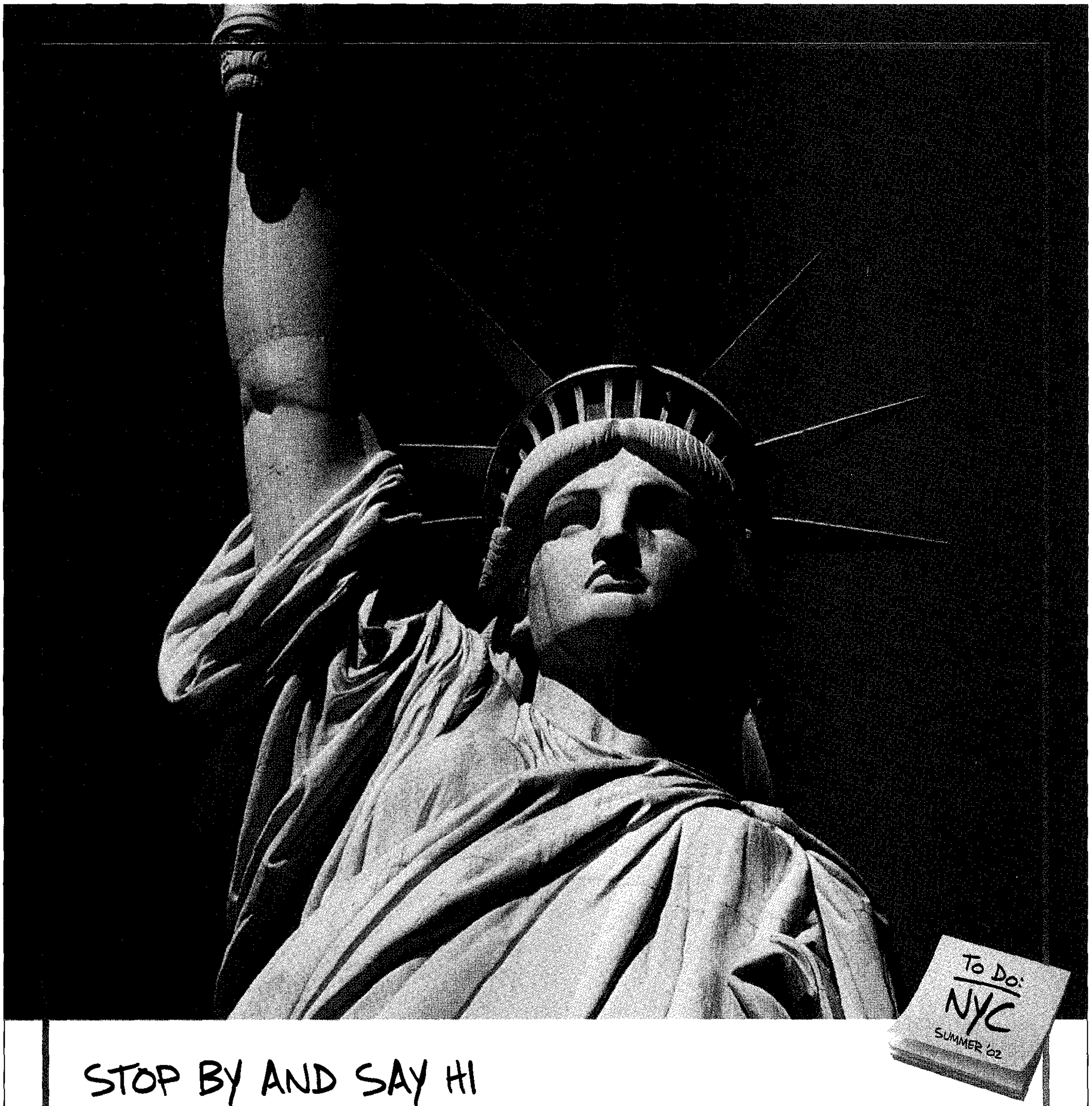

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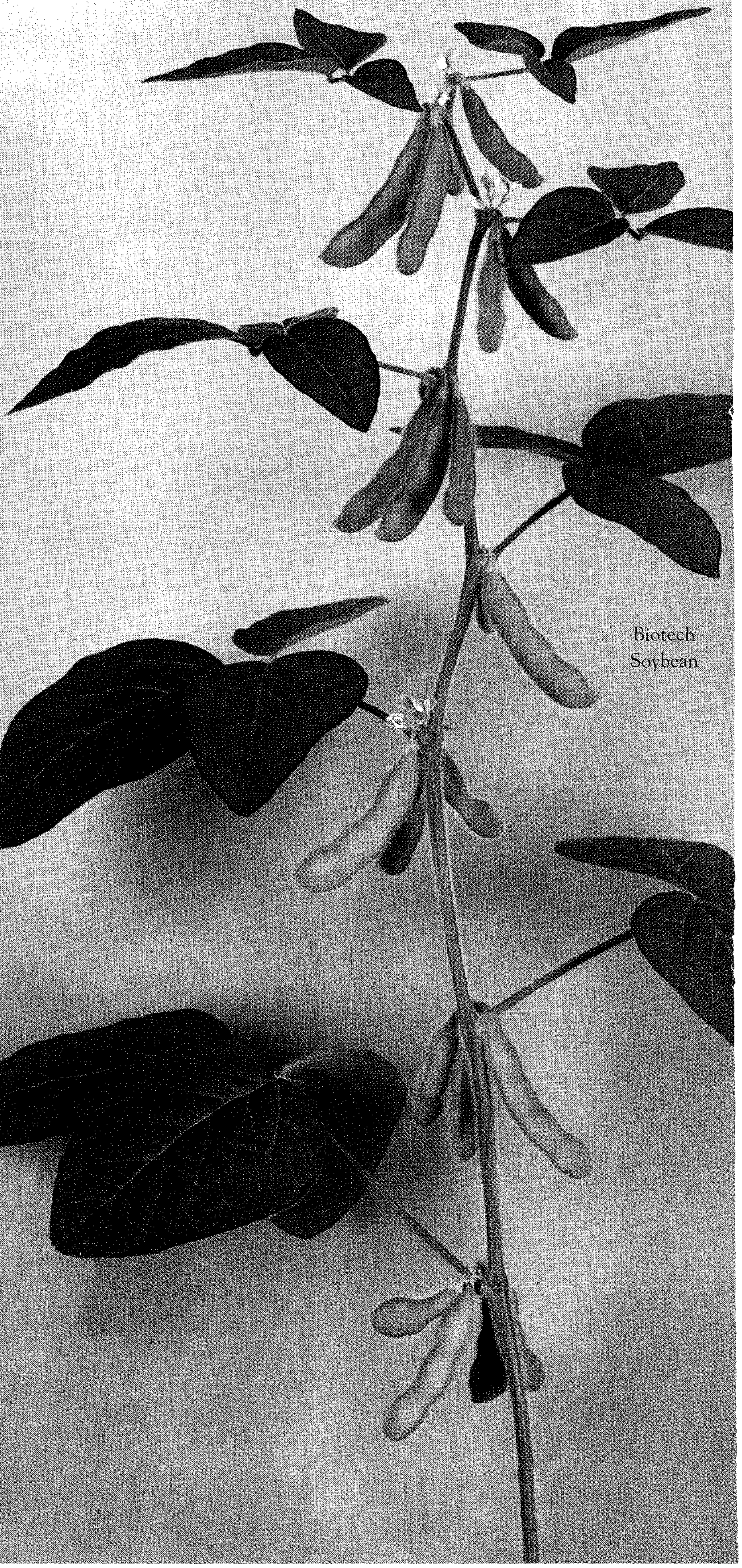

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